

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

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1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)		2. REPORT DATE 7 June 1996		3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Master's Thesis, 2 Aug 95 - 7 Jun 96	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE The Campaign to Defend Southwest France; 1 July 1813 Through 14 April 1814				5. FUNDING NUMBERS	
6. AUTHOR(S) Major Kenneth A Turner, U.S. Army					
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort Leavenworth, Kansas 66027-1353				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
DTIC QUALITY INSPECTED 4					
12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.				12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE	
13. ABSTRACT (Maximum 200 words) This study examines the campaign to defend southwest France from 1 July 1813 until 14 April 1814 to garner insights that are applicable to today's officer. In the first stages of the campaign Marshal Soult conducted an operational offensive across the Pyrenees Mountains but was defeated at the Battle of Sorauren. After this battle, Soult retreated back into France and attempted to defend the French frontier by occupying three successive river lines. Wellesley attacked and defeated Soult's army at each of these lines forcing the French to ultimately retire on Toulouse where the campaign ended. A study of this campaign illustrates that there are a number of intangible factors that effect the success of a campaign. These factors include the impact of the commander's vision on the conduct of the campaign, as demonstrated by his active involvement in the operations, the decisions he makes during the campaign, as well as his ability to translate strategic guidance into a sound operational plan.					
14. SUBJECT TERMS Napoleonic Wars, Peninsular Campaign, Wellesley, Wellington, Soult,				15. NUMBER OF PAGES 142	
				16. PRICE CODE	
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE Unclassified	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT Unclassified	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Unlimited		

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THE CAMPAIGN TO DEFEND SOUTHWEST FRANCE
1 JULY 1813 THROUGH 14 APRIL 1814

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by

KENNETH A. TURNER, MAJ, USA

B.A., Arkansas Technical, University, Russellville, Arkansas, 1982

M.A., Troy State University, Troy, Alabama, 1993

FORT LEAVENWORTH, KANSAS
1996

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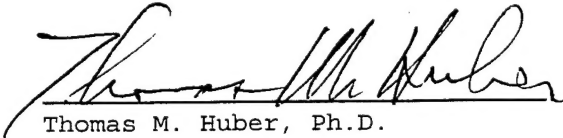
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THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

Name of Candidate: MAJ Kenneth A. Turner

Title of Thesis: The Campaign to Defend Southwest France, 1 July 1813
Through 14 April 1814

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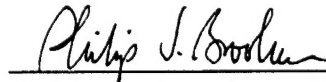
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ABSTRACT

THE CAMPAIGN TO DEFEND SOUTHWEST FRANCE 1 JULY 1813-14 APRIL 1814 by
Major Kenneth A Turner, U.S. Army, 142 pages.

This study examines the campaign to defend southwest France waged by Marshal Nicholas Soult against the Anglo-Allied Army of Arthur Wellesley from 1 July 1813 until 14 April 1814 to garner insights that are applicable to today's officer. In the first stages of the campaign Marshal Soult conducts an operational offensive across the Pyrenees Mountains but is defeated at the Battle of Sorauren. After this battle, Soult retreats back into France and attempts to defend the French frontier by occupying three successive river lines. Wellesley attacks and defeats Soult's army at each of these lines forcing the French to ultimately retire on Toulouse where the campaign ends.

A study of this campaign illustrates that there are a number of intangible factors that effect the success of a campaign. These factors include the impact of the commander's vision on the conduct of the campaign, as demonstrated by his active involvement in the operations, the decisions he makes during the campaign, as well as his ability to translate strategic guidance into a sound operational plan. Other intangible factors identified include the effects of soldiers' morale on operations and the commander's employment of forces in the manner in which they are trained.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In the 1840s King Louis Phillipe of France organized a display at the Palace of Versailles to honor the exploits of Marshal General Nicholas Soult. At the dedication for this display, Soult observed that of all his military exploits the one that he was most proud was the defense of Toulouse in 1814. He followed by stating that it was his finest battle because he was fighting against three allied armies: the British, the Spanish and the Portuguese, led by the greatest of all allied commanders Arthur Wellesley.¹ The Battle of Toulouse was the final act in the campaign to defend Southwest France in 1814, and Soult lost the battle and the campaign. While Soult believed that Toulouse was his greatest battle, there is little utility in examining the defense of Toulouse from a historical perspective. The campaign was lost prior to the battle occurring at Toulouse. It is this campaign, leading up to Toulouse that merits consideration for the insights that can be garnered from its study.

In the closing months of 1813 Napoleon appointed Marshal Soult as commander of French forces in Spain. Marshal Soult's mission was to defend the southwest frontier of France from the advancing allied army. The opposing forces were equal in many respects, yet in the end Marshal Soult failed in his mission. Why was he unable to defend Southwest France from the advancing Allied army? Looking at the numbers of

soldiers involved and the physical characteristics of the area of operations reveals that the French should have been able to defend the frontier. The correlation of forces was relatively equal throughout the campaign and the terrain favored the defender. However, a closer examination of the campaign can identify many intangible causes for the French failure. The French Army Soult commanded was fraught with problems that affected its performance that cannot be accounted for by just assessing the numbers of soldiers involved. Other intangible factors contributed to his failure. These intangible factors included the leadership demonstrated by Soult, as illustrated by his decisions during the campaign, the methods he employed, his lack of vision, morale of the soldiers, and the force mix of his army. Many of Soult's operational successes were later neutralized by tactical failures either on his part or the part of his subordinates. He often displayed extraordinary talent at the movement of large bodies of soldiers over vast distances, what is currently thought of as the operational level, but failed to achieve tactical victories due to a lack of initiative or will.

During this campaign, Marshal Soult demonstrated outstanding abilities in the area of administration as he organized, managed and controlled his command. However, his lack of aggressiveness and overcautious nature at the tactical level, coupled with his predictability, led to his failure. Throughout 1813-1814 he missed several opportunities to defeat the British. A demonstration of this unwillingness to take risks is illustrated by an encounter between Wellesley and Soult in the Pyrenees at the Battle of Sorauren. As the

French were pursuing the British after the Battle of the Roncsevalles Pass, Wellesley rode ahead with an aide to reconnoiter the French positions. Upon arriving along the front, among his cheering soldiers, he spied Soult across the valley. During this encounter an aide heard Wellesley mumble as to himself "Yonder is a great commander, but he is a cautious one, and will delay his attack to understand the cause of these cheers; that will give time for the Sixth Division to arrive, and I shall beat him."² Wellesley was right. He beat Soult in the ensuing battle and the campaign. Soult's cautious nature prevented him from taking advantage of numerous opportunities to defeat the Anglo-Allies during the campaign. This theme runs throughout the campaign and as such this campaign serves as a model of how tactical failures can neutralize operational successes.

Another factor that prevented Soult from achieving success was the method of warfare he attempted to employ during the campaign. The campaign to defend southwest France is an anomaly of traditional Napoleonic warfare. Soult failed to conduct the campaign in what was considered Napoleonic fashion. Warfare, as conducted by Napoleon, was characterized by bold, aggressive, offensive operations. These operations capitalized on speed and outmarching the enemy with the intent of destroying the enemy's will to fight. This was accomplished through the destruction of their field army in the climactic battle. This was the essence of Napoleonic warfare. With the enemy's ability to resist destroyed, Napoleon could then dictate whatever political terms he desired. It was in this way that Napoleon integrated the political policy with the military strategy to attain that policy.³ The principal

element of Napoleon's method of war can be found in his own words.

"There are in Europe many good generals, but they see too many things at once; I see only one thing, namely the enemy's main body. I try to crush it, confident that secondary matters will then settle themselves."⁴ Soult failed to do this and pursued geographic objectives as opposed to the destruction of the enemy's forces.

Soult also conducted a primarily defensive campaign. After the failure of the initial counterattack, which culminated at The Second Battle of Sorouren, Soult went on the operational defensive. This abdicated the initiative to Wellesley and played to one of Wellesley's strengths, positional warfare. Conversely, the French method of warfare was not conducive to defensive operations. "Make war offensively; it is the sole means to become a great captain and to fathom the secrets of the art."⁵ This was what Napoleon envisioned as the most effective way to wage war. He went on to say "That the soldier who sits in his position and waits for his adversary to attack is more than half-beaten before the first shots are exchanged. . . ."⁶ This is the critical mistake Soult commits in the campaign as he occupies successive defensive lines along the French frontier. Wellesley then takes advantage of the situation, maneuvering Soult out of each position until Soult becomes trapped in Toulouse.

Another intangible that adversely influenced Soult's leadership effectiveness was his lack of vision. One of the most critical characteristics of a successful commander is the ability to interpret and translate strategic guidance into operational and tactical objectives. This is particularly important in the case of a modern Commander-in-Chief

(CINC) who has to translate sometimes vague political guidance into achievable military objectives to meet the political goals. Only when commanders establish the conditions they want to achieve in advance, can they communicate their intent to their subordinates. To be successful, commanders must possess a "vision" of what they expect to accomplish in the pursuit of a particular campaign or operation. Clausewitz termed this the "inner light" to understand what must be done and when it must be accomplished.

If the mind is to emerge unscathed from this relentless struggle with the unforeseen, two qualities are indispensable: first an intellect that, even in the darkest hour, retains some glimmerings of the inner light which leads to truth; and second, the courage to follow this faint light wherever it may lead. The first of these qualities is described by the French term, *coup d'oeil*, the second is determination.⁷

During the campaign in southwest France, Napoleon provided Soult with strategic directive that was constrained by political considerations. Napoleon's strategic directive concentrated on the retention of geographic locations because of the political ramifications of losing territory or cities. Soult failed to translate this guidance into a successful plan. Soult should have understood that Napoleon's strategic directive was affected by political considerations and might be inappropriate to the situation and modified his operational plan to accomplish the overall strategic objective. Soult failed to apply a vision to the directive that would have allowed him to employ Napoleonic methods of warfare to achieve the strategic goals.

The Army's morale also hindered its performance. Its will to fight was seriously affected by the subsequent losses it incurred beginning at Sorauren and continuing until the loss of Toulouse.

Soult's Army's effectiveness was also hindered by the quality of its soldiers. From the very beginning of the campaign, the army lost quality veteran soldiers to support Napoleon's efforts in eastern France. The replacements for these soldiers were normally conscripts whose quality was suspect. The effectiveness of the Army was also hampered by the lack of cavalry which was removed at an ever increasing rate by Napoleon as the campaign continued. This lack of cavalry adversely affected Soult's ability to conduct reconnaissance throughout his area of operations.

In essence, Soult failed to failed to apply the art of generalship and it is because of this that he failed. The success of an army in war is dependent on the generalship of its commander. While generalship is not the only determining factor for success it is the preeminent. As Napoleon said:

The personalty of the general is indispensable, he is the head, he is the all, of an army. The Gauls were not conquered by the Roman legions, but by Caesar. It was not before the Carthagian soldiers that Rome was made to tremble, but before Hannibal. It was not the Macadonian phalanx which penetrated to India, but Alexander. it was not the French Army which reached Weser and the Inn, it was Turenne. Prussia was not defended for seven years against the three most formidable European Powers by the Prussian soldiers, but by Frederick the Great.⁸

And as such it was not the French soldier or the terrain that lost the campaign for the French, but Marshal Soult. Wellesley defeated Soult because he exhibited generalship. Wellesley displayed untiring energy, coupled with the ability to be at the critical place of combat at the critical time, the ability to inspire the soldiers to greater efforts, outstanding physical courage and creative intelligence. Soult, on the other hand, failed in many of these areas.

It is not the intent to examine this campaign in order to provide a checklist of principles or a template for success. It is, however, important to study a variety of examples to attempt to "educate the judgment of the commander" as Michael Howard has said.⁹ This campaign provides an example that should be examined to educate military leaders and obtain some manner of seasoning from the experiences of others. Napoleon said that it is through the study of great captains, their battles, and through experience that a knowledge of the higher level of war is acquired. While Marshal Soult is not of the stature of the men he had in mind, i.e., Alexander, Hannibal, Gustavas, Turrene and Frederick, he was one of the premier commanders of what was once the dominant Army of the age. However, his last campaign ended in failure and often more can be learned from examining a failure than can be learned from success. Because of this, there is value in exploring his final campaign during the Napoleonic Wars to glean insights that might provide an informed perspective on solving contemporary issues for military leaders.

The examination of this campaign includes the time immediately after the Battle of Vittoria until the end of the Battle of the Nive River around Bayonne in early December 1814. While this is occurring in the west of France, Napoleon is engaged in a struggle for his Empire in the East against the Sixth Coalition. The Campaign in the west lasted from July 1813 until 14 April 1814. When Soult initially arrived, his army is demoralized and unorganized. He immediately instilled confidence in his soldiers and took the offensive against the Anglo-Allied Army headed by Arthur Wellesley. During this initial offensive

Soult surprised Wellesley and forced the passes of the Pyrenees Mountains. Despite the initial surprise and subsequent success, Soult lost the initiative and suffered a defeat at the Battle of Soruoren. As a result of this defeat, Soult was forced back into France where he occupied successive defensive positions only to be outmaneuvered and eventually defeated by Wellesley the ensuing battles. Even though this campaign was an integral part of the effort to defend France in the final years of the Napoleonic Empire, it is less studied than the efforts in the east, which were under the direct influence of Napoleon.

To analyze the campaign it is first necessary to describe the overall strategic situation of the French and the Allies leading into 1813. This will include a description of Napoleon's strategy after 1812 and the Allies overall strategy to defeat France. It will also describe where in the strategic situation the campaign fits to provide a context of its importance.

After discussing the strategic situation, the thesis will continue with a description of the theater of operations detailing the physical characteristics of the French southwest frontier. This will provide an understanding of the operational environment of the campaign.

The operational situation will include a brief summary of the commanders involved, the forces they commanded, and a brief discussion of the differences in the way the French and British waged war during the Napoleonic wars. The thesis will conclude with an analysis of a description of the major events of the campaign from 1 July 1813 until the Battle of Nive where Wellesley defeats Soult and begins his final drive on Toulouse.

Endnotes

¹Peter Hayman, Soult: Napoleon's Maligned Marshal (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1990), 209.

²J. T. Headley, Napoleon and his Marshals, (Chicago: Thompson and Thomas Publishers, No Date), 86.

³Peter Paret, Makers of Modern Strategy from machiavelli to the Nuclear Age (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986), 129-131.

⁴David Chandler, The Campaigns of Napoleon (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1966), 141.

⁵Correspondence of Napoleon, vol. XXXI, (Paris, 1858), 209.

⁶Chandler, 145.

⁷Karl V Clausewitz, On War ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), 102.

⁸J. F. C. Fuller, Genralship: Its Diseases and Their Cure, A Study of the Personal Factor in Command (Harrisburg: Military Service Publishing Co., 1936), 30.

⁹Michael Howard, Clausewitz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 32.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STRATEGIC SITUATION

Historians often cite Napoleon's efforts to defend his empire in 1813-1814 as an example of Napoleon at his best. Many writers and historians frequently study the campaign to determine what insights can be gleaned for the activities of the Emperor without regard for the operations to defend the Empire in other theaters. An integral aspect, but less studied part of this campaign, is the defense of the southwest of France waged by Marshal Soult. Before the actual events in the south are recounted, it is necessary to describe the strategic setting in the west. This will provide the context to where Soult's efforts fit in with the final months of the Napoleonic Empire.

The campaign to defend France in 1813-1814 truly begins with the crossing of the Berezina River by the remnants of Napoleon's Grand Armee between November 26-28, 1812.¹ This event marked the end of the invasion of Russia and was the final episode in the destruction of the Grand Armee. On December 5, 1812, Napoleon left what remained of the army in the hands of Marshal Murat, and returned to Paris. He arrived in Paris on 18 December to begin the seemingly insurmountable task of preparing for the coming invasion.² The raising of the new army for the campaign in the east had an adverse impact on the Spanish theater throughout 1813 and 1814.

Along the German frontier the French Army of the Main, now under Eugene de Beauharnais, Napoleon's stepson who had assumed command from Murat, continued to give ground as the Russians advanced. On 30 December 1812 it recrossed the Neiman River, and continued its retreat. During the next two months it was pushed back to the Vistula and from there to the Oder River. By the 10 March 1813 Eugene had positioned his army on the left bank of the Elbe River awaiting the arrival of replacements under Napoleon.³

During this time the political situation throughout Europe was changing rapidly. When Napoleon invaded Russia in 1812, almost all of Europe was united behind him either through voluntary or coerced assistance. Only England, Portugal, and Russia were actively opposed to Napoleon. This all began to change after the defeat in Russia. As the extent of the losses in Russia became apparent to the other nations they began to withdraw their support for the French. On 17 March 1813 Prussia declared war on France. As a result, all of the major powers, with the exception of Austria, were actively engaged against the French.⁴ The Sixth Coalition to defeat Napoleon began to take shape.

Napoleon Rebuilds His Army: Effects on the Spanish Theater

Napoleon immediately set out to organize the force to repel the expected onslaught from the Sixth Coalition. He set for himself a goal to raise an army of 656,000 men to offset the losses of the Russian Campaign.⁵

To create this new army, Napoleon relied on a combination of sources for manpower. These sources included a reorganization and reallocation of men already in the service of the Empire and an

aggressive recruitment of new soldiers.⁶ It was the soldiers of the first category that influenced the affairs in Spain.

The quality of the soldiers already in uniform varied depending on the source. Those of the municipal guards or the coastal ship guards were of questionable quality. On the other hand, the soldiers reassigned from the Spanish frontier were veterans and generally quality soldiers. Because of the shortage of veterans in Germany, Napoleon hoped to capitalize on the qualities of the veterans from Spain to fulfill three purposes. The first objective was to refill the ranks of the Imperial Guard Infantry to include the Old, Middle and Young Guard regiments. Secondly, Napoleon expected to rebuild his cavalry. Finally, he wanted to strengthen the line and light battalions of his new army in Germany.⁷

The most important priority for Napoleon's new army was to replenish the ranks of the Old and Middle Guard Regiments. To accomplish this, Napoleon ordered that each line and light battalion serving in Spain nominate twelve soldiers for service in the Guard. One-half of these soldiers were required to have served in the army for eight years and were subsequently assigned to the Old Guard Foot Regiments. The other six soldiers nominated were to have at least four years' experience and were destined for the Fusilier Grenadier and Fusilier Chasseur Regiments.⁸ As a result of these endeavors, Napoleon reinforced four regiments of the Imperial Guard, however, at a cost of the loss of 3,000 hardened veterans from the armies of Spain.⁹

The Young Guard was reinforced at the expense of the French armies in Spain. Operating within Spain were the Young Guard 3rd

Voltigeurs, the 3rd Tirailleur Regiments, and elements of the 1st Voltigeurs and the 1st Tirailleur Regiments. Napoleon recalled these units to form the nucleus of the new Young Guard Regiments for the upcoming campaign.¹⁰

Napoleon looked to the Spanish theater to provide existing line infantry battalions as a nucleus around which the new army could be formed. He accomplished this by directing the 3rd, 4th and depot battalions of the regiments serving in Spain to redeploy to staging areas in Germany.¹¹

Finally, Napoleon called on the French armies in Spain to help rebuild his depleted cavalry arm. Within Spain there were two sources of experienced troopers. The first source was the depot squadrons of those regiments currently serving in Spain. Napoleon ordered these squadrons to report for duty along the Rhine River. These elements were to be kept together and combined with other elements to form new line regiments. The other source for cavalry within Spain was from the thirty active regiments currently serving in Spain. Of these regiments Napoleon directed that each would provide twenty of their best troopers, with mounts, to be assigned to the Guard Cavalry.¹² Additionally, on 25 February 1813 Napoleon directed his Minister of War, Henri Clarke, that a further 200 troopers would be needed from Spain to reconstitute the Gendarmes de Elite.¹³ These measures to reconstitute the new army adversely effected the French armies in Spain.

As a result of these measures, the French armies in Spain were stripped of over 20,000 veteran soldiers.¹⁴ This was only the beginning of a constant drain of manpower from the Spanish theater to support the

operations in the west. Napoleon looked to Spain repeatedly during the course of 1813 to 1814 to provide veterans to reinforce his inexperienced armies in the west.

By April of 1813 Napoleon had raised close to the 656,000 men he thought necessary to begin his campaign. He joined Eugene at Erfurt with a new Army of the River Main which included over 200,000 men.¹⁵

French Strategy, 1813

While Napoleon was busy rebuilding his army, he was also developing his strategy to defend his Empire. Although there was no strategy in writing, it appears that his fundamental strategic objective was the maintenance of the territorial integrity of the Empire at its 1813 borders. To accomplish this he envisioned conducting a delay by Eugene's army as far to the east as possible. His apparent intent was to keep the allied armies east of the Elbe River until he could join Eugene with his new army.¹⁶

As part of the overall strategy, Napoleon believed that offensive operations in Spain were possible and even necessary, to threaten Portugal and forestall the advance of the Allied armies towards France. The political problems facing Napoleon with the ever growing strength of the Sixth Coalition governed his Spanish policy. Napoleon hoped that military successes in Spain would garner political support and prevent other countries from joining the coalition. He was still intent on holding as much of Spain as possible and did not even consider evacuation of the Peninsula and defending the French frontier along the Pyrenees.

To accomplish this in May of 1813 he directed Joseph to move from Madrid and suppress the insurrections in Northern Spain. This would have freed garrison soldiers and other resources involved in suppression activities to be available to swell the army's ranks for line duty. These soldiers could then be available to conduct offensive operations against the Anglo-Portuguese Army. This was intended to prevent Wellseley from advancing out of Western Spain. Additionally, Napoleon directed Joseph to take the field as a "soldier king" and abandon Madrid, moving his headquarters to Valladolid.¹⁷

While Napoleon was rebuilding his shattered forces for operations in the east, the allies in Spain under Wellesley, were situated around Ciudad Rodrigo, preparing to renew the advance towards France in the spring of 1813. The Allied Army was in Central Spain as a result of the only significant French success of 1812. This occurred when Joseph forced Wellington to abandon the siege of Burgos and retire upon Ciudad Rodrigo. After this, Wellesley was content to spend the winter of 1813 in central Spain.¹⁸

At Ciudad Rodrigo, Wellesley gathered reinforcements and planned operations for the new campaign in the spring of 1813. He took the offensive in 1813 and with steady pressure forced the French forces under King Joseph back to the River Ebro. On 21 June 1813 Wellesley defeated the French at the Battle of Vittoria.¹⁹

The Battle of Vittoria was a turning point in the Peninsular War. After this victory the road to France lay open. The French were virtually expelled from the Peninsula. The only parts of Spain containing French forces were Suchet's men in the Province of Aragon

north of the Ebro River and the isolated forces in Pampluna, San Sabastian, and Pancoro.²⁰

The remnants of Joseph's army retreated past the Pyrenees into France where they were joined by Genral Bertrand Clausel's division and reinforced by garrison forces from northern Spain. Wellesley moved to occupy the passes opposite the French in the Pyrenees. The primary objective of the British in Spain was achieved. As Napier described it:

The whole line of the Spanish Frontier, from the Roncesvalles to the mouth of the Bidassoa River was thus occupied by the victorious allies, Joseph's reign was over. The crown had fallen from his head, and after years of toil and combat which had been admired, rather than understood the English General, emerging from the chaos of the Peninsular struggle, stood on the summit of the Pyrenees a recognized conquerer.²¹

The effects of the French loss were felt throughout Europe and the hoped for military success to affect the political situation did not transpire.

Napoleon heard about the disaster of Vittoria while at Dresden on 1 July 1813 from a report from Major Baltazar, Aide-de-Camp from the Minister of War.²² Napoleon immediately realized the seriousness of the situation and appointed Marshal Soult as his Lieutenant General and commander of all forces in Spain. In a letter to Soult dated 1 July 1813 Napoleon provided Soult with his instructions: for what he expects of Soult when he arrives at his new command:

Start to-morrow before 10 P.M. You must travel incognito, assuming the name of one of your aides-de-camp. You will reach Paris on the 4th Thence you will continue your road in order to assume the command of my armies in Spain. To avoid all difficulties, I have appointed you my lieutenant-general commanding my armies in Spain and on the Pyrenees. . . . You must take measures to re-establish my affairs in Spain, and to preserve Pampeluna, St. Sebastian, and Pancoro²³

An examination of this dispatch illustrates the level of strategic freedom Soult had in the Spanish theater. It clearly describes Soult's operational objective and his freedom of action to accomplish his mission. He feels he did not have the freedom to develop his own course of action to meet the strategic objective. Napoleon is still focused on the occupation of Spain without considering how best to defend France. By instructing Soult "to preserve Pampeluna, St. Sabastian and Pancora" he prevented Soult from developing his own plan to defeat Wellesley. The Anglo-Allied army should have been Soult's objective, not the defense of meaningless fortresses. Soult was a seasoned commander. His experience serving in Spain should have shown him that the destruction of the British Army was critical to French success in the Peninsula.

News of the allied victory at Vittoria reached London on 3 July 1813²⁴ and was greeted with enthusiasm and subsequent high expectations as to the next move on the part of Wellesley. The British Government decided to support the Allies in the east by following up the victory with continued pressure on the French in Spain. This policy is detailed in a dispatch to Lord Cathart, the British Ambassador to Russia, who was accompanying the Russian Emperor at allied headquarters in the east:

You will inform the Emperor (Alexander) that it is the intention of His Majesty's Government, in the event of the enemy being expelled from Spain, actively to employ the Allied armies on the side of France in such a manner as will best serve to occupy the attention and military resources of the enemy, and thereby to favour the exertions of the allies in other parts of Europe.²⁵

The British Government also provided authority to Wellesley to enter France and to make whatever requisitions he saw fit to prepare his army for future operations. The government did not, however, provide detailed instructions on how Wellesley was to accomplish his mission.

This the government wisely left to Wellesley. The freedom of action to pursue the campaign how he saw fit was critical to Wellesley's future success. It allowed him to pursue the courses of action he deemed appropriate, considering primarily military considerations in his operations, without concern for being second guessed by the politicians in London. The freedom of action can be attributed to the confidence that London possessed in Wellesley's abilities.

The general mood of the British government was one of total support and high expectations on the abilities of Wellesley. He was well thought of at the highest levels of government and had the total confidence to pursue his objectives. He was so highly respected that members of Parliament often wrote to him requesting advice on matters of military, personal and government nature. There are even instances of correspondence from members of Parliament requesting advice on matters appearing before the legislative body.²⁶ This level of confidence helps explain the relatively free hand Wellesely possessed to pursue his objectives with a maximum of operational freedom, and minimal political interference from London.

Physical Characteristics of the Area of Operations

The campaign of 1813 to 1814 was conducted in the area around the French and Spanish frontier near the Bay of Biscay. The area encompasses San Sabastian on the northwest, Pampeluna in the southwest, north into France around Bayonne, and south to St. Pied de Port. The area of operations is roughly a rectangle starting in Spain including the territory from San Sabastian and Pampeluna in the southwest stretching northeast to the Adour river in France. (See Figure one.)

The region is mountainous and rugged, bisected with numerous rivers rugged rocky spurs and deep ravines. Communications, as well as the movements of formed bodies of troops, is difficult except by certain passes, roads, and tracks. The terrain is compartmentalized and divides military operations into separate actions aimed at controlling the various passes and river crossing sites in the region. Control of these passes is critical to successful military operations and as result many actions in the upcoming campaign centered around control of them.

This area is dominated by the Pyrenees Mountains which form a physical barrier between France and Spain. These mountains generally run northwest to southeast and rise to above 6,000 feet in the area of operations. They prevent the movement north to south except through the use of several passes. In the eastern section, along the border between Spain and France, the mountains are traversed by four militarily significant passes. From east to west these include the Irun pass, close to the Bay of Biscay; the Vera pass, leading into the Batzan Valley; the Maya pass; and the Roncesvalles pass. On the Spanish side of the mountains, deep valleys separate the passes hindering lateral movement between the passes. On the other hand, along the French side approaching Toulouse, the land flattens out into a plain. This leveling of the countryside allows lateral movement between the passes that is not possible on the Spanish side. This provide a military advantage to forces operating on the eastern side of the Pyrenees. The movement of large forces on the western side can take up to a day longer than the movement of the same forces in parallel lines on the eastern side.²⁷ This provides a distinct operational advantage to forces on the eastern

side as they can be repositioned quicker allowing the concentration of numerically superior forces at the critical place and time of the commander's choosing.

In addition to the mountains, deep valleys, and high passes, the region is bisected by numerous rivers. These rivers flow from the Pyrenees into the Bay of Biscay on a generally north-westerly course. The most prominent of these include the Bidossoa, the Nivelle, and the Nive. They all require the use of fords or bridging sites to cross and are accordingly obstacles to the movements of military formations. Because of this, the rivers also form natural defensive positions if properly employed.

Endnotes

¹Armand De Caulaincourt, With Napoleon in Russia, ed. J. Hanoteau (New York: William Morrow and Co. Inc., 1935), 244-252.

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³Petre, 39.

⁴Beatson, 8.

⁵David Chandler, The Campaigns of Napoleon (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1966), 866.

⁶Scott Bowden, Napoleon's Grand Armee of 1813 (Chicago: The Emperors Press, 1990), 21.

⁷Bowden, 28.

⁸Henry Lachouque, Anatomy of Glory, trans. Anne S. K. Brown (Providence: Brown University Press, 1961), 278.

⁹F. Loraine Petre, Napoleon's Last Campaign in Germany 1813 (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1912), 14.

¹⁰Bowden, 29.

¹¹Bowden, 29.

¹²Bowden, 28.

¹³Bowden, 352.

¹⁴Bowden, 30.

¹⁵David Chandler, The Campaigns of Napoleon (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1966), 874.

¹⁶Petre, 43.

¹⁷Dodge, 733.

¹⁸C. W. Robinson, Wellington's Campaigns 1808-1815: Part II Barrosa to Vittoria and Invasion of France (London: Hugh Rees, Ltd., 1907), 267-270.

¹⁹Robinson, 282-291.

²⁰Michael Glover, The Peninsular War 1807-1814: A Concise Military History (London: Newton Abbot, 1974), 244.

²¹Dodge, 745.

²²F.C. Beatson Wellington: The Bidassoa and Nivelle, (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1931), 24.

²³D.A. Bingham A Selection From the Letters and Dispatches of the First Napoleon (London: Chapman and Hall Ltd., 1884), 257.

²⁴Glover, 245.

²⁵Beatson, 2.

²⁶Beatson, 17.

²⁷W. H. Fletcher How England Saved Europe: The Story of the Great War 1793-1815 (New York: Charles Scribners Sons., 1900), 399-400.

CHAPTER THREE

THE OPERATIONAL SITUATION

The commanders involved in the campaign, from division commanders to commanders-in-chief, possessed a wide array of backgrounds and varied experiences. All were seasoned veterans of many campaigns who rose to their positions largely through meritorious service to their countries. However, one aspect they all had in common was their service in the Peninsula. All of the senior commanders involved in the defense of Southwest France served in the Peninsula almost continuously from 1808 onward. An understanding of their experiences is necessary to comprehend their actions in the campaign.

The French Commanders

Marshal Soult arrived in Bayonne to take command of the French forces in Spain on 12 July 1813 and immediately set to work restoring the morale and reorganizing his forces.¹ He displayed his usual energy in performing the administrative duties necessary to reform the army. Initially it appeared that the confidence the Emperor displayed in selecting Marshal Soult for this crucial mission was well founded. However, as the campaign progressed, this confidence proved misplaced as Soult failed in many aspects.

Soult began his Peninsular experience facing General Moore in the campaign that culminated in the escape of the British Army at

Corruna in 1808. Soult was one of Napoleon's ablest marshals and, except for Marshal Massena, possessed the most experience in fighting the British. He had spent most of his time from 1808 through 1813 fighting in the Peninsula and was beaten by Wellington on several occasions.²

After the British evacuated Spain, Soult invaded Portugal with the intent of securing Lisbon. He advanced through the northern part of the country and defeated the Portuguese army at Oporto. After securing Oporto, Soult paused to consolidate his position both politically and militarily before continuing his advance to capture Lisbon. During this pause, the English under Wellesley landed in Portugal. Wellesley advanced from Lisbon to expel the French from Oporto. Soult established defensive positions along the Douro River and awaited the British advance. On 12 May Wellesley surprised Soult by crossing the Douro River above the city and defeated the French at the Battle of Oporto. The English forced the French to retreat, losing in the bargain all their artillery, baggage trains, and abandon wounded. Wellesley pursued Soult out of Portugal and forced him back into Spain on 19 May 1809.³

This initial meeting between Wellesley and Soult has much in common with the 1813 to 1814 campaign and had a lasting influence on Soult. The surprise Wellesley inflicted on the French at the Duoro river crossing adversely affected Soult. When the French were defending the Bidassoa, Nive, and the Nivelle rivers in the 1813 to 1814 campaign, Soult remembered the Douro river crossing when making his defensive dispositions. This caused Soult to be very cautious while on the defensive and very vulnerable to deception operations conducted by Wellesley.

During the summer of 1809, Napoleon assigned Soult as Chief of Staff to King Joseph, in charge of three corps operating in western Spain. Their mission was to invade Portugal. Soult operated within Andalusia meeting with success against the Spanish armies. However, when Wellesley moved to threaten Madrid Soult refused to support Joseph in the operation to defend Madrid. As a result, Joseph was forced to confront Wellesley without Soult's forces and was beaten at the Battle of Talavera.

Despite the victory, the British army was in a precarious position after Talavera because of the length of their supply lines to Portugal. Soult tried to interdict these lines, however, he failed to defeat Wellesley at the battle of the Almaraz river. Despite his victory Wellesley retreated into Portugal and King Joseph forbade Soult from pursuing.⁴

Regardless of these failures, in 1809 Napoleon appointed Soult Major General to King Joseph, replacing Marshal Jourdan. In 1810 Soult invaded Andalusia and captured Seville, Olivenca, and Badajoz in support of Marshal Massena who was operating in Portugal against Wellesley.⁵

The first months of 1811 involved operations around Badajoz leading to the next confrontation with Wellesley. After leaving a small garrison at Badajoz, Soult moved his army to Seville. This resulted in the Allies laying siege to Badajoz with Beresford's Anglo-Portuguese army. Soult moved to raise the siege and Beresford defeated him at the Battle of Albuera and forced Soult to retreat. After Albuera, Soult united with Marshal Marmont and attempted to raise the siege again. The French were successful and on 19 June 1811 forced Wellesley back to

Portugal. Soult operated within Andalusia for the remainder of 1811 invading Grenada and supporting Massena in Portugal, while simultaneously securing Badajoz.⁶

As 1812 began, Wellesley made another attempt to capture Badajoz. The Allied army advanced out of Portugal and from March 16 through April 6 laid siege to the city. Soult failed to relieve the city which then fell to the Allies. The fall of Badajoz released Wellesley's army from the confines of Portugal and provided it with maneuver space in which to operate. Wellesley attacked Marshal Marmont's army and defeated it at the Battle of Salamanca. This defeat forced Soult to evacuate Andalusia and link up with Marshal Suchet and King Joseph at Valencia on September 1812.⁷ The combined force was then able to force Wellesley to retreat westward from the siege of Burgos. Soult reentered Madrid with Joseph on 2 November 1812, then continued to pursue Wellesley's retreating army. After a series of marches and countermarches, the two armies settled into winter quarters with Wellesley around Ciudad Rodrigo and Soult occupying Toledo.⁸

On 3 January 1813, Napoleon recalled Soult to the east to serve on the Imperial Staff to assist the ailing Berthier. With the death of Marshal Bessieres at Lutzen on 2 May 1813, Napoleon reassigned Soult as Commander of the Imperial Guard.⁹ In that capacity Soult served at the Battle of Bautzen 20-21 May 1813 and played an important role in the battle. He led the decisive attack of VI Corps as it penetrated the right center of the Allied line near the Pliskowitz and Krechitz area.¹⁰

During the Battle of Bautzen Soult's performance was reminiscent of Austerlitz. The attack was well planned, organized, and executed. He displayed outstanding leadership abilities as he executed the plan designed by the Emperor. However, this belies a problem that Soult's actions in the Spanish campaign will clearly reveal. Soult routinely operated successfully under the direct supervision of Napoleon. Napoleon would provide the plan and Soult would execute it at the tactical level. However, when out of sight of the Emperor, Soult often failed at the tactical level to follow through with his own operational vision.

The commanders that served under Soult during the 1813-1814 campaign also had a vast level of experience in the Peninsula. They were extremely capable commanders with all of his three wing commanders going on to achieve the distinction of being named Marshals of France under the Bourbons. They included Generals Charles Reille, Jean Drouet and Bertrand Clausel as wing commanders and several notable officers commanding the divisions¹¹.

General Charles Michel Joseph Reille was commander of the Right Wing during the campaign and like many of his contemporaries rose rapidly through the ranks. He served in the Armies of the Revolution volunteering in 1791. Reille was promoted in 1802 to General of Brigade and was posted to the Grand Armee in 1805. Reille served with the Grand Armee at the Battle of Saalfeld, Jena and Pultask. Napoleon promoted him to General of Division in 1806 and appointed an Imperial Aide De Camp. He served in this capacity at the Battle of Friedland and was also present at the signing of the Treaty of Tilsit.¹²

General Reille's long involvement in the Peninsula began in 1808 when he accompanied General Savory to the Spanish capital. While in Madrid he helped overthrow Ferdinand V which resulted in the Spanish popular revolt against the French involvement in Spain. With the beginning of the Peninsula War, Reille was called on to capture Rosa which he accomplished on 5 December 1805.¹³

After Reille's first successful experience in Spain, Napoleon recalled him to serve in the 1809 campaign against Austria. This he did with distinction at Essling as an Imperial Aide and again at Wagram, leading the Guard Tirailleurs against the Austrian center, supporting MacDonald's attack that ended the battle. At the conclusion of the German Campaign, Napoleon dispatched him to Antwerp for a short mission and then returned to Spain to serve as governor to Navarre Province.¹⁴

Throughout 1810 and into 1811, Reille was involved in suppressing guerilla activities in his province; a task in which he met with little success. He later joined Marshal Suchet's force in December 1812 at which time he assisted in the occupation of Valencia. After this, Reille returned to North Eastern Spain to take command of the newly formed Army of the Ebro. His new mission was to secure the lines of communication to the French armies operating in Eastern Spain by subduing the guerrillas operating in Aragon and Catalonia.¹⁵ Reille met with the same failure with his new army as he did with his forces in Navarre. Guerilla activities continued in the provinces and Reille was unable to maintain communications to the interior. Reille's next challenge was of a more conventional nature but would produce similar results, as he joined his army with Joseph's for the Battle of Vittoria.

Moving to support King Joseph in the interior, Reille joined his Army of the Ebro with the armies of Clausel and Drouet to face Wellesley at Vitoria. Reille performed well at Vittoria but his efforts could not salvage the situation. After the defeat of the French at Vittoria, Reille retired behind the Bidassoa.

The Commander of the Center in Marshal Soult's newly organized Army of Spain was Jean-Baptiste Drouet, Comte d'Erlon. Of all of Soult's senior commanders Drouet had the least amount of experience in the Peninsula. While Drouet is infamous was his noninvolvement in the dual battles of Quatre Bras and Ligny, his career prior to that incident was marked with distinction.

Drouet joined the French Army in 1782 and achieved the rank of General of Brigade in the Revolutionary Army by 1799. He was present at Hohenlinden in 1800 and served with distinction as a brigade commander. Because of this service he was promoted to General of Division in 1803. During the Austerlitz campaign, Drouet commanded a division in Bernadotte's I Corps and played an important role in securing the French center as St. Hilaire's Division assaulted the Pratzen Heights. Unfortunately in the Jena Campaign, Drouet missed both of the decisive battles as Bernadotte loitered between supporting Davout at Auestadt and Napoleon at Jena. However, his division was involved in the subsequent pursuit of the Prussians and later occupied Lubeck.¹⁶

After the Prussian Campaign, Napoleon selected Drouet to serve as Victor's Chief of Staff in X Corps in the Russian campaign and he was subsequently wounded in the chest at Friedland. The wound was serious enough to necessitate recovery in France and it was not until 18 January

1808 that he returned to active service with the Army. At this time he was assigned as commander of the 11th military district with headquarters at Bordeaux.

With the beginnings of the problems with Austria in 1809 Napoleon, reassigned Drouet from the relative quietness of the 11th District to become Chief of Staff of the VII Corps under Marshal Lefebvre. During the 1809 campaign Drouet did not operate with the main army but worked to quell the revolt in the Tyrol which was led by the insurgent leader Andreas Hofer. During this time he gained valuable experience for his future assignments in Spain. Despite this experience, the efforts to stop the insurgency were ultimately unsuccessful. This failure led to the replacement of the Corps commander, Marshal Lefebvre, by Drouet and on 11 October 1809 Drouet received his first opportunity to command at that level.¹⁷

Drouet immediately set out to pacify his region of responsibility. He went on the offensive and moved to destroy the insurgent force of Hoxen. Drouet attacked the insurgents and dispersed them at the battle of Brixen on 11 November 1809. The dispersion of the insurgents enabled him to begin pacify the region. Instead of putting the area to the torch, as had been the previous method employed by the French, Drouet attempted to take a more conciliatory line and encourage the bandits to return to their homes. His methods were successful and the majority of the bands gave up to the French authorities. As a result, the bandit leader Hoxen was later captured and executed. Drouet's successful pacification of the Tyrol offered many insights on how to successfully quell a popular uprising. He appealed to the

population's good will so as not to alienate them from the French soldiers. He also emphasized the involvement of the Bavarian officers under his command to gain their confidence and good will. This helped improve the relationship between the French and the native Bavarians, which negated the popular support from the populace. The insurgents had relied on this popular support to stay a viable nuisance to the French. Another worthwhile experience from the Tyrolian affair was the valuable insights it provided Drouet on how to operate in mountainous terrain. Drouet implemented several innovative techniques of operating in the mountains. He trained his troops in conducting night operations and emphasized the use of outflanking passes and strong positions instead of using costly frontal assaults. Additionally, he emphasized the use of large amounts of skirmishers to occupy the high ground. These techniques were deemed essential to winning any mountain campaign.¹⁸ All of these techniques would prove valuable in his future experiences in the Peninsula. However, he failed to further develop these ideas in Spain to achieve any real success.

Due to his success in suppressing the insurgents in the Tyrol Napoleon assigned Drouet to the Peninsula. Until the Waterloo campaign he was to spend the rest of his time during the Napoleonic wars in Spain.

From 1811 to 1812 Drouet operated under the various commanders in the confusing command structure of the Peninsula. Initially he fell under the command of Massena in the conflict with Wellesley and eventually his corps was transferred to the command of Soult. Under Soult, Drouet commanded the V French Corps operating against the English

at Badajoz. Throughout the next few years he operated under either Soult or Marmont against Wellesley. While under Soult's command in February 1812, Drouet and Soult began what would grow into a strained relationship between the two men. This occurred when Soult reorganized his army and reduced the status of Drouet's command from that of a corps to a division. Drouet perceived this action as an insult to his ability to command large formations and from then on the relations between the two men were particularly strained. After numerous reorganizations resulted in his command going back and forth between the major commanders in Spain, Drouet eventually was given command of his own army by King Joseph in the reorganization of October 1812.

In this reorganization Drouet received the command of the Army of the Center under Joseph. He was thus equal to Soult who was also an army commander. However, the two men still allowed their personal differences to affect operational decisions. In November 1812, when Wellesley was in danger of being cut off from his supply lines to Portugal, these personal differences prevented effective coordination between the two armies preventing the French from seriously damaging the Anglo-Portuguese Army. After this failure, Drouet's Army was spread out along a two hundred mile front attempting to hold Madrid and the surrounding countryside. Wellesley attacked in June of 1813 and forced Drouet to retire on Vittoria where the French armies were concentrating under King Joseph. Drouet's performance at Vittoria was without distinction and he was forced to retire with the remnants of his army to positions behind the Bidassoa in France.¹⁹

Of all of Soult's commanders in the upcoming campaign, General Drouet had spent the least amount of time in the Peninsula. Despite this relatively short time in Spain he did manage to come to major disagreements with Marshal Soult on several occasions. The strained relationship between the two commanders would, in the upcoming campaign, cause problems in command and control.

The commander of the Left Wing of Marshal Soult's Army of Spain was General Bertrand Clausel. Up to the time when he took command of the Left Wing he had an extremely varied career with early experiences in the Peninsula. He first joined the French National Guard in 1789 and was posted to the Pyrenees along the Spanish frontier. By 1799 Clausel was promoted to General of Brigade. His career was unusual compared to his fellow wing commanders. He was not involved in many battles that directly involved the Emperor and tended to be posted to some very unusual areas outside of the mainstream of the Napoleonic Wars. For example, in 1801-1802 he served under Leclerc in Santo Domingo. Following service in Santo Domingo he was shipwrecked off the coast of Florida. After returning to France he held positions in Holland, Italy and Dalmatia prior to being sent to the Army of Portugal in 1810.²⁰

From 1810 to 1812 Clausel served with the Army of Portugal commanding a division. In 1812 he played a crucial role in the Battle of Salamanca preventing the French defeat from turning into a rout. When Marmont was severely wounded by a cannon ball and the French second in command General Bonet was also put out of action Clausel took command of the French Army. He immediately set to restoring the situation in the French ranks and prepared a counterattack against the Anglo Allied Army

of Wellesley. Clausel sent a French Division against the British Sixth Division to reestablish the line. The French were ultimately repulsed but the counterattack bought time for the French. Clausel used this time to bring up General Foy's Division to cover the French retreat.²¹ While the battle ended in a French loss, Clausel did demonstrate his ability to command large bodies of soldiers and use his initiative to act decisively. He performed with distinction and prevented the total annihilation of the French Army during the subsequent retreat.

After the Salamanca Campaign, Clausel received command of his first army. In January 1813 he replaced General Caffarelli as commander of the Army of the North in Spain. General Clausel was in command of this army during Wellesley's 1813 offensive that culminated with the Battle of Vittoria. The Army of the North was operating in Galicia when Wellesley advanced to defeat Joseph's three armies around Vittoria. Joseph pleaded with Clausel to move to support his armies. By the time Joseph's letters reached Clausel's headquarters it was too late for Joseph. Clausel did respond, much to his credit, but was only able to make it as far as Longrono, thirty miles south of Vittoria, when the battle was fought. After the Battle of Vittoria, Clausel again covered the retreat of the remainder of the French armies, much like after Salamanca, but this time to the French frontier.²² Clausel's Army was the only significant fighting force remaining and when Soult took command he reorganized Clausel's Army of the North into the Left Wing of his new Army of Spain.²³

General Clausel's performance as an independent commander reveals several insights into his abilities and weaknesses. He failed

to comprehend the speed of the Anglo-Allied army's advance to the Ebro river. This surprise resulted in his army being out of position to support the other three French armies during the Battle of Vittoria. This shows a lack of understanding of the strategic situation and of the role his army played in the overall situation. On the other hand, his rapid response to King Joseph's plea for assistance was commendable. He did not display any of the petty jealousies that were common among many of the independent commanders in Spain. This is to his credit, as was his performance after the battle. He managed to cover the French retreat and keep his army intact during the Anglo-Allied pursuit. This allowed Marshal Soult to at least have some semblance of an organized force to form the basis of his new army during the reorganization. This successful withdrawal while maintaining his army, illustrated his above average tactical ability, which his previous service consistently demonstrated as his strength.

Soult's Wing commanders were capable men who had served their country well during their extensive service. Their performance in the upcoming campaign would be mixed. Reille was a reliable commander who enjoyed distinguished service devoid of any real controversy or gross errors of judgement. His performance during the upcoming campaign continued in this way and proved solid and conscientious. Drouet's performance, on the other hand, would be disappointing. His lack of aggressiveness and display of timidity in the beginning of the campaign were forebodings of his performance during the Waterloo campaign where his corps marched and countermarched between the battlefields of Quatre Bras and Ligny. Clausel's achievement during his career continued

during the upcoming campaign. He demonstrated sound tactical judgement and bold, aggressive decision making whenever necessary. He consistently demonstrated a sound understanding of tactical imperatives and sense of urgency when required.

The Allied Commanders

Wellesley is often thought of as the premier British general in history matched only by The Duke of Marlborough. While on campaign he displayed an almost inexhaustable level of energy and always appeared at the critical place of battle at the crucial time. This ceaseless activity served him well since he seldom trusted his subordinates with any measure of independence preferring to oversee important issues himself. He was a very serious officer with few close acquaintances. He exuded the strong sense of confidence and authority which is common to many strong leaders.

He developed a large part of his expertise by applying himself very seriously to the professionalism of his trade while in India. There he devoted himself to his profession and cultivated a sense of self discipline that was uncharacteristic of most British officers of his day. He disdained the drinking and gambling that consumed the time of many of his fellow officers and lived a somewhat spartan existence. It was in India where Wellesley developed his keen sense of the importance of terrain. He became a master at occupying defensive positions and allowing his foe to expend themselves against his defenses. He used this technique often to defeat larger forces in the Peninsula.

Wellesley was also known as a great administrator which he also cultivated in India. The remoteness of the Indian frontier was very similar to that which he faced in Spain and Portugal. In this environment he learned the importance of maintaining his army in fighting condition. He understood that replacements would not be forthcoming from home and he would have to husband whatever forces he possessed. This meant keeping his army well fed and intact. He understood the key element of British land power was to ensure that the army existed and survived. Taking unnecessary gambles that might lead to the destruction of this army would not suit Wellesley's command style.

In 1808 Arthur Wellesley was assigned to Portugal to begin the long campaign that established him as one of the most famous and successful commanders in military history. However, it was his experiences in India, prior to his arrival in Spain, that provided him with the background for that success.

Like the vast majority of British officers of the time Wellesley purchased his commission. He bought his lieutenancy in the 73rd Foot in 1787 and by 1794 purchased a Lieutenant-Colonelcy in the 33rd Foot. In 1796 the British War Office posted the 33rd Foot to India with Wellesley as commander. Wellesley served in India until 1805 and garnered the experience that would serve him well in his later years.²⁴ While in India, Wellesley began to apply himself seriously to his profession as a soldier. He was promoted to Major General in 1802 and in his first independent command defeated the Mahrattas leader Doulet Rao Sindhia at Assaye in 1803.²⁵ He returned to England in 1805 to pursue a political career.

While in England he was somewhat successful pursuing politics becoming a member of Parliament in 1806 while remaining active with his military career. In 1807 he commanded a brigade in the Copenhagen Expedition. His first experience in the Peninsula came in 1808 when, as a lieutenant general, he was dispatched to Portugal at the head of a British contingent intended to provide support to the Portuguese in their war with the French. He enjoyed success during his first Peninsular expedition defeating the French at Obidos, Rolica, and finally at Vimiro. After the Convention of Cintra the Government recalled Wellesley to face a court of inquiry over the cause of the British failure. Wellesley escaped the inquiry without a blemish and returned to the Peninsula to begin the portion of his military career that resulted in his fame.²⁶

In April 1809 Wellesley returned to the Lisbon to take command of the British forces operating in the Peninsula. His first major victory in the Peninsula occurred when he defeated Marshal Soult at the Battle of Oporto which pushed the French out of Portugal. He followed this initial success with an advance into Spain and the subsequent victory at Talavera. This victory helped secure the British position in Portugal and earned him the title of Viscount of Wellington.²⁷ Despite this victory, Wellesley was unable to continue to advance into Spain because of supply problems and was forced to retire to Lisbon where he began the fortifications of the area which came to be known as the lines of Torres Vedras.²⁸

Wellesley spent the next few years consolidating his base in Portugal looking for an opportunity to assume the offensive to expel the

French from Spain. In 1810 a French Army under Marshal Massena invaded Portugal. Wellesley defeated this Army at the Battle of Bussaco on 26 September 1810 and retired on his defensive lines again. The French were unable to penetrate the Lines of Torres Vedras and were forced to retreat due to lack of supplies. Wellesley pursued them back into Spain and on May 3 and 5, 1811 defeated Massena again at The Battle of Fuentes d'Onoro. This battle finally eliminated the French threat to Portugal and set the stage for the Anglo-Allied offensive.

In 1812 Wellesley advanced into Spain and captured the fortresses of Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajoz which opened the way for his further advances into the interior. He moved towards the Spanish capital and after months of maneuvers and counter marches defeated the French under Marshal Marmont at Salamanca. The victory at Salamanca allowed Wellesley to advance on the Spanish capital of Madrid. As he moved toward Madrid he moved to besiege Burgos and was subsequently repulsed by Marshal Soult and forced to retire once again to Portugal. He established his headquarters near Ciudad Rodrigo and he used the winter months of 1812 preparing to renew his offensive to expel the French from the Peninsula.²⁹

In 1813 Wellesley advanced into Spain once again opting this time to avoid Madrid and to attempt to outflank the French forces. He advanced to the northeast and in a series of river crossings and flanking maneuvers, brought the French armies under King Joseph to bay at the Battle of Vittoria. Wellesley inflicted a decisive defeat on the French and forcing them to evacuate all but three fortresses in the Peninsula.³⁰ He accomplished this by conducting what was for his style

of warfare, an uncharacteristic attack against the French forces of King Joseph.

After Vittoria, the King of England made Wellesley a Field Marshal and Duke, however, the campaign to defeat the French was not complete. Wellesley still had to invade France to defeat the newly appointed Marshal Soult.

The Army that Wellesley commanded in the upcoming campaign was highly trained and experienced with commanders that possessed similar extensive seasoning. The commanders and army had been together, for the most part, from the beginning of Wellesley's Peninsula experience.

The Army was not organized into corps like the French. The highest permanent command structure, until after Vittoria, was the division. However, during the campaign in the Pyrenees, Wellesley organized his eight British divisions into semi-independent wings of corps size equivalents, under a select few of his division commanders. These men included Generals Rowland Hill commanding the left, William Carr Beresford seconding Wellesley in the center and Thomas Graham on the right.³¹

Wellesley's style of command can best be understood by relating a conversation that occurred between Wellesley and Sir James McGregor. McGregor had moved some supplies to Salamanca to provide assistance to the many sick and wounded that had accumulated around the city. Upon hearing of this Wellesley rebuked McGregor angrily "I shall be glad to know, who commands this army-I or you? I establish one route, one line of communications-you establish another by ordering up supplies by it. As long as you live, sir, never do that again. Never do anything

without my orders." When McGregor pleaded that he only took action to help save lives and that Wellesley could not be contacted, he was again reprimanded to "never again act without his orders."³² Wellesley preferred blind obedience in his subordinates and discouraged initiative and independent thinking that might conflict with his intentions which he held from most of his officers. He preferred men who would accept orders without thinking. As Sir Charles Oman said 'Anything that seemed to Wellington to partake of the nature of thinking for oneself was an unpardonable sin in a subordinate.' The only exceptions to this general rule seemed to be Generals Hill, Beresford, Graham and Crauford who Wellesley would sometimes provide the why and wherefore of his instructions to in his written orders.³³

Lieutenant General Rowland Hill served as Wellesley's second in command during the campaign. He entered the British Army in 1790 and in 1793 was serving as an aide-de-camp at the siege of Toulon. In 1794 he was the Lieutenant Colonel of the 94th foot and commanded the regiment in the Egyptian Campaign of 1801 where he was wounded at Alexandria. Upon returning from Egypt he was posted to Ireland where he was promoted to Major General in 1805. After a brief stay in Hanover, Hill was sent to the Peninsula³⁴ to serve under Wellesley and then General Moore. He commanded a brigade at Rolica under Wellesley and under Moore at Corunna in 1809. He was appointed a division commander by Wellesley and served in this capacity at Talavera in 1809. In 1810 he was forced to leave active campaigning due to ill health, but was back under Wellesley's command in 1811.

It was in 1811 that Wellesley began to recognize Hill's ability to operate independently. In October 1811, Wellesley sent Hill, with a division of 10,000 men, to destroy the French division of General Girard, which was isolated from any French support. Hill surprised Girard's forces in the village of Arroyo dos Molinos on the night of 27 October 1811 and with the help of a blinding rainstorm, surrounded the French forces by cutting off their retreat routes to the east. Hill's forces then stormed the village and defeated Girard with the loss of only fifty-four wounded and seven killed. French losses were 2,300 captured, three hundred killed and three guns lost. The battle marked the end of the French efforts in Spain in 1811 and resulted in the dismissal of Girard by Napoleon.³⁵

Hill displayed sound tactical judgement in achieving his victory. He demonstrated an outstanding sense of timing and an understanding of the need for urgency in the presence of the enemy.

The victory at Arroyo dos Molinos began to establish in Wellesley's mind that General Hill was a capable and trusted subordinate. As a result in 1812 he was promoted to lieutenant general and was given another semi-independent command.

In May 1812, Hill led his two brigade division to secure a bridging site over the Tagus river to prevent its use by the French. A small French force of 1,000 men defended the Almaraz bridge. Hill led his division in an attack that secured the fortresses overlooking the bridge and destroyed the pontoon bridge emplaced over the river by the French. As a result of Hill's action, the forces of Marshal Marmont

were unable to support Marshal Soult who was operating in the South against Wellesley.³⁶

The action at Almaraz helped firmly establish Hill's reputation as a successful independent commander and a reliable subordinate. While the action did not require any appreciation for strategic operations it did require an understanding of the operational situation. Hill understood the importance of the Tagus river and its affects on the ability of the French forces of Marmont and Soult to combine. This unification of forces would place the Anglo-Allied Army at a distinct numerical disadvantage. Hill aggressively pursued his objective with this in mind. The capture of the Almaraz bridge prevented this unification and helped the overall operational situation of Wellesley's forces.

It was actions like Arroyo dos Molinos, Almaraz and Hill's subsequent performance at Vittoria and the invasion of France that led Wellesley to hold Hill in quite high regard. Wellesley wrote on Hill's death that "nothing ever occurred to interrupt for one moment the friendly and intimate relations which subsisted between us."³⁷ Hill was one of the few of Wellesley's generals that he trusted.

After Almaraz and Arroyo dos Molinos, Hill continued to rise in favor with Wellesley. He commanded the right wing at Vittoria and was employed in increasingly independent operations in the invasion of France. Wellesley did not take many men into his confidence, however, Hill's performance while serving in the Peninsula marked him as an exception to this rule. Hill continuously demonstrated the ability to

operate with minimal guidance and perform with distinction. He possessed an outstanding sense of tactics and operational insight.

Another of Wellesley's senior commanders during the campaign was William Carr Beresford. He entered the British Army in 1785 purchasing his commission with the 6th Foot. He rose through the ranks purchasing his promotions and eventually served with the 69th foot at the siege of Toulon in 1793. Distinguishing himself at Toulon, he was promoted and received command of the 88th Foot in 1794 which he took to India from 1801 to 1803.³⁸

In India he was promoted to brigadier general and participated in the 1801 expedition from India to Egypt in support of Abercrombie's invasion. After service in India he assisted in the recapture of the Cape of Good Hope in 1806 and in 1807 captured Buenos Aires. However, after capturing the city he was forced to defend it from recapture and ultimately surrendered in 1807 to the French led Spanish force of General Santiago de Liniers. Beresford was captured after surrendering the city but was able to escape and return to England. In the same year the British Government sent him to Portugal to be the Governor of Madeira where his long and beneficial connection to the Portuguese began.³⁹

William Beresford most excelled at the administration and the training of an army. It was the appointment to Madeira that provided him with the opportunity to demonstrate this talent. While Governor of Madeira, he learned to speak Portuguese and was appointed as commander in chief to the Portuguese Army in the name of the Monarchy. He also cultivated relationships with the important government leaders. This

was the beginning of a long relationship with the Portuguese Army that was to last for the rest of his career.

After service in Madeira, Beresford commanded under Wellesley in 1808 and then under Moore during the Corruna Campaign. Following the retreat from Corruna, Beresford returned to Lisbon to train the Portuguese Army; a task that he was extremely successful at as evident by the performance of the Portuguese Cacadores during the later campaigns. His efforts earned him the respect of Wellesley and a Marshal's baton from the Portuguese on 2 March 1809.⁴⁰

After being promoted to Marshal, Bersford spent the next year training the Portuguese Army and was then dispatched by Wellesley in May 1812 to besiege Badajoz. Soult forced Beresford to abandon the siege and move south east to fight the battle of Albuera⁴¹. While Beresford did win the battle of Albuera it was primarily due to the actions of his subordinates and not any tactical flair on his part. Beresford, with a 35,000 man Anglo-Allied army faced Soult with 24,000 men. The French began the battle with an attack on the Allied right. The attack was initially successful forcing the Spanish on the flank to retreat and threatening to roll up the entire Allied line. Efforts by Beresford to reposition the Portuguese to repulse the French failed as orders were confused and outright ignored. The situation were saved by the initiative of General Lowry Cole and his British Fourth Division. General Cole moved his division from its reserve position in the center rear of the allied formation to shore up the threatened flank. He did this after a request to move was denied by Marshal Beresford. The arrival of Cole's division stabilized the right flank and with a

subsequent counterattack, ended the battle. In addition to the actions of General Cole the indecisiveness displayed by Soult also contributed to the Anglo-Allied victory. As General Cole moved his division into position to attack the French, Soult hesitated at the critical moment. As The French pressed the attack on the flank, Soult rode up to observe the progress of the fight. The realization that the Anglo-Allied Army outnumbered the French came as somewhat of a surprise to him. Upon this discovery, Soult called a halt to the advance and prepared to defend the ground the French had gained. This pause allowed Cole to position the Fourth Division for the counterattack and subsequent victory.⁴²

The Battle of Albuera did nothing to enhance Beresford's reputation as a tactician. The initiative displayed by General Cole and the cautious nature of Soult were critical factors in the Allied victory. Beresford did not demonstrate a very high level of tactical expertise or genius during the battle. However, tactical expertise was not a virtue that Wellesley needed in his commanders. Nevertheless, Beresford demonstrated a high level of administrative ability in his independent operations. This was his most valuable attribute. He was capable of managing the most minute detail to ensure the efficient administration of his command. This was an invaluable in assuring that his army was well fed and maintained.

This administrative ability and care for his soldiers did not go unnoticed by Wellesley. When asked to assess Beresford's abilities Wellesley responded "All I can tell you is that the ablest man I have yet seen with the army, and the one having the largest views, is Beresford. . . . but I am quite certain he is the only person capable of

conducting a large concern." When asked by his staff who should be considered for assuming command of his forces in the event that he should fall, Wellesley went on to say "Beresford". He continued with "I see what you mean by your looks. If it is a question of handling troops, some of you fellows might as do as well, nay, better than he; but what we want now is some one to feed our troops, and I know of no one fitter for the purpose than Beresford."⁴³ Wellesley recognized Beresford's talents as an administrator and employed him in various capacities during the remainder of the campaign to defeat the French. Beresford was present at Salamanca, where he did not command but exercised a general supervision over the Portuguese troops and was wounded. He also served at Vittoria in a similar fashion. He continued to serve Wellesley well in the campaign to invade France in the same capacity.⁴⁴

General Thomas Graham was a relatively reliable commander that Wellesley employed in semi-independent operations of short duration. He commanded the left wing of the Anglo-Allied Army up until the Allies crossed the Bidassoa River at which time he was invalided home due to a recurring eye problem.⁴⁵ Graham was unique among Wellesley's commanders for a number of reasons.

Graham entered the British Army as a middle aged man as a result of the mistreatment the corpse of his wife received at the hands of French custom officials in 1792. Because of this incident Graham became an extreme Francaphobe and pursued the war against France as a personal vendetta.⁴⁶ In 1793 he volunteered as an unpaid aide-de-camp to Lord Mulgrave at the siege of Toulon. In the following year he

raised his own regiment of Scottish volunteers, the 90th Foot and became the unit's Lieutenant Colonel.⁴⁷ He commanded the regiment in the Quiberon expedition in the support of Royalist forces in the Vendee in 1796.⁴⁸

After returning to England in 1796, Graham was posted to serve as the British liaison officer with the Austrian forces in northern Italy. He was at Mantua with Wurmser during the siege and later served under Captain Ball of the Royal Navy during the siege of Malta.⁴⁹ It was after the treaty of Amiens and four years of military inactivity that Graham's association with the Peninsula began.

In 1800, Graham returned to England and served as a member of Parliament until his connections helped secure him position on General Moore's staff. He served in this capacity in both the expedition to Sweden in 1808 and the Corunna Campaign in 1809. Through the influence of Moore he was able to secure a regular commission with the rank of Major General. He commanded a brigade in the ill-fated Walcheren expedition and returned home to England in 1809. In 1810 the British Government appointed Graham to command the British garrison of Cadiz. However, before assuming his post, it was necessary to relieve the forces besieged inside Cadiz. This attempt to relieve the siege led to what was to become Graham's most famous battle.

The French had been blockading Cadiz since 5 February 1810. In an attempt to relieve the garrison, Graham marched from Tarifa at the head of a British contingent of an Anglo-Allied army consisting of 4,900 British and 9,600 Spanish for a total force of 15,000 soldiers. Graham was serving under the Spanish General Manuel La Pena. The Anglo-Allied

force was attacked as it approached Cadiz by the French corps of Marshal Victor. General La Pena immediately retreated in the face of the French attack leaving General Graham's force isolated to face the French attack. Graham immediately deployed the 28th Infantry Regiment to delay the French to allow his two remaining brigades time to deploy. The 28th bought him enough time to organize his remaining forces to counterattack. The resulting counter attack drove the French off the field with the loss of an Eagle; opening the road to Cadiz at a cost of 1,200 British casualties.⁵⁰ Graham exhibited an aggressiveness and personal leadership style that helped to ensure victory. He displayed a keen sense of timing and urgency at the decisive moment in the battle. However, despite his local victory, the activities of his Spanish allies prevented a complete victory. As a result, Graham resigned his post at Cadiz in protest of the Spanish inactivity and in June 1811 joined Wellesley's Army of Portugal as a division commander.

Under Wellesley, Graham commanded the 1st division at Ciudad Rodrigo in January 1812 and subsequently three divisions at the siege of Badajoz in the following April. After Graham's successful performance at Badajoz, Wellesley added two cavalry brigades to his command for the Allied advance to Salamanca. However, Graham was unable to command at Salamanca due to an eye infection that caused him to return to England to recuperate.⁵¹

After Graham returned from England in 1813, Wellesley gave him a larger force to control during the Vittoria Campaign. Graham commanded the left wing of the newly reorganized Anglo-Allied army consisting of two British Divisions, two Portuguese brigades and a

Spanish contingent. During the campaign, Graham led his force on three different flank marches, each one forcing the French to abandon prepared defensive positions. The final flank march was in coordination with Wellesley's advance to the Battle of Vittoria. During the battle, Graham led his twenty thousand man force on a sweeping operation around the right wing of the French Army to cut the road to France. Graham's force managed to threaten the right rear of the French force by attacking the bridges at the Gumara Mayor. This operation was critical in the defeat of the French and the subsequent pursuit of Joseph's Army.⁵²

Graham performed well under Wellesley during the Peninsular Campaigns and he would continue this service in the upcoming operation. The continual increase in the size of the forces placed under his command is evidence of the confidence that Wellesley had in Graham's ability to control large elements. However, it should not be mistaken for a trust by Wellesley in Graham's ability to operate independent of a higher authority. Wellesley realized that Graham was a competent commander, but in keeping with his style of command, kept him constantly under his eye.

The Opposing Forces

Throughout most of the war in the Peninsular the French were superior to the Anglo-Allied forces in terms of raw numbers. This situation began to change in 1812. After the battle of Vittoria in 1813, the advantage began to dramatically shift in favor of the Allies.

When Soult arrived in Bayonne on the 12 July to take command of the French forces, he found his army in a state of confusion and disorganization. Only the division of General Foy was in any state of cohesion. During the retreat from Vittoria the army had lost almost all of its artillery and baggage. Resupply was nonexistent and officers and men were forced to forage on their own for their needs. Units were hopelessly intermingled with almost no unit integrity. General Headquarters had no idea of the location of various units and it was up to Soult to sort out the confusion and restore military discipline and order to what had become an armed mob.

Soult's first order of business was to restore morale to his shattered forces. He attempted to accomplish this on 23 July 1813 by issuing a forceful order of the day blaming the recent disasters on the incompetent senior leadership of King Joseph and Marshal Jourdan. He went on to say that the recent defeat was in no measure the fault of the brave and honorable French troops and that it was up to them to repair the damage that had occurred and restore the honor to the French Empire.⁵³ After working to improve the morale of the army, Soult turned his attention to reorganizing and refitting his forces.

The first step in Soult's reorganization was to abolish the army structure implemented by King Joseph which included organizations titled Army of the South, North, Center and Portugal respectively. He replaced it with an organization based on wings which were roughly the size of the conventional French Corps. These wings were based on divisions of about 6,000 men and each division included two brigades of from two to five battalions. These divisions were grouped into three

wings. The Right Wing, of Lieutenant-General Reille, consisted of the 1st Division of General Foy; the 7th of General Maucune and the 9th commanded by General Lamartiniere. The Center Wing commanded by Lieutenant-General Drouet, consisted of the 2nd Division of General Darmagnac, the 3rd Division commanded by General Abbe' and the 6th Division of General Marasin. The Left Wing was commanded by Lieutenant-General Clausel and consisted of General Conroux's 4th Division, General Vaudermaeson's 5th Division and General Taupin's 8th Division.⁵⁴ The implementation of a wing structure, as opposed to the Corps de Armee system normally used by the French, was unusual. There is no valid military reason for this unique organization. It was a political measure to placate the feelings of the former army commanders. It served as a mechanism for Marshal Soult to impose his will on the commanders and to assert his authority over commanders who had until recently been independent army commanders.

After this reorganization, the French army consisted of ten infantry divisions, two cavalry divisions and one hundred and forty nine artillery pieces. This included 70,369 infantry; 7,081 cavalry, and 14,938 artillery men, engineers, and gendarmerie for a total strength of 92,388 officers and men fit for duty. A significant weakness in the French forces was the shortage of cavalry. There were only two cavalry divisions in the Soult's army. One was a dragoon division of two brigades commanded by General Treilhard and another mixed division of three brigades commanded by Phillippe Soult the Marshal's brother.⁵⁵

(See figure 2)

The Anglo-Allied force facing the French were a mixed force in terms of capabilities and nationality. In July 1813 Wellesley had an army of over 100,000 men. This included 43,000 British and 57,000 Portuguese. Additionally, there were 25,000 Spanish regulars that Wellesley could call on for operations. However, only 82,000 men were immediately available for the advance on the Pyrenees.⁵⁶ The British forces were of high quality. They excelled in defensive operations and were unsurpassed in marksmanship. The British infantry of the day were arguably the best infantry of the age except for perhaps Napoleon's Guard. The Portuguese were also solid infantry with their light infantry being especially well disciplined. They excelled in open order operations and skirmishing and were a welcome addition to the Anglo-Allied army. The Spanish on the other hand, were somewhat of a burden for the Allied Army. Their infantry was unreliable and generally broke when required to defend in a static position. Additionally, they lacked the discipline to close with a defender when required to attack.

The Allied Army consisted of eight British Infantry Divisions, one Portuguese Infantry Division, one independent British Brigade and two independent Portuguese Infantry Brigades. In addition to these forces Wellesley controlled two Spanish Divisions.⁵⁷ (See figure 3.) During the campaign, Wellesley would also receive additional forces from England. Wellesley did not organize his divisions into any permanent corps-level organization. However, he did assign elements of two or more divisions to Generals Hill, Beresford and Graham during the campaign.

Operational Plans

French Plans and Dispositions

Soult's immediate objective was detailed in the correspondence from the Emperor dated 1 July 1813. It required Soult 'to reestablish my affairs in Spain, and to preserve Pampeluna, St. Sebastian and Pancoro. . . .'⁵⁸ These orders were later amended by correspondence dated 7 July 1813 to include the assumption of offensive operations as soon as possible.⁵⁹ It remained for Soult to determine how best to accomplish this. The issue of relieving Pancoro had resolved itself having fallen to the British already. Soult eventually decided to march to the aid of Pampeluna. This decision was influenced by an 18 July report from an aide-de-camp of the French Governor of St. Sebastian, General Rey, that the French could resist for another fifteen days.⁶⁰ Strategic political considerations were also at play effecting Soult's decision. The Emperor was growing impatient for some sort of success from the Spanish frontier. Napoleon amended his orders to Soult in later correspondence which is indicative of this anxiety: "I expect news from the army with impatience. . . .Unless the losses are more considerable than have been presented I hope that 100,000 men will be concentrated on the Bidossa, and that Marshal Soult will deliver Pampeluna and drive the English back across the Ebro. . . ."⁶¹ Based on this information Soult decided to relieve Pampeluna.

After relieving Pampeluna, Soult planned to march westward, attack Wellesley from the rear and relieve San Sabastian. Once these key cities were relieved, the French would then march farther west threatening the Ebro or march to join Suchet's forces to the south.⁶²

On 19 July the French army was positioned along the French side of the Pyrenees watching the passes through the mountains and the sea approach. The Right Wing of Reille, along the east bank of the Bidossoa river, was responsible for the approach from the sea to the Bayonette Mountain near the village of Sarre. The Center, under Drouet, was responsible for the Maya Pass and occupied the area around Ainhua, and Espelette. The 2nd Division with Darmagnac commanding, was at Espelette with the 3rd Division under Abbe and the 6th under Marausin occupying Ainhua to the southwest. The Left Wing was positioned from St. Jean Pie-de Port to St. Etienne de Baigorry watching the pass of Roncsevalles which controlled the entry into the Batzen valley. He occupied St. Jean Pied De Port with two divisions and positioned the 4th Division of Conroux at St. Etienne de Baigorry. Soult stationed his cavalry between the Nivelle and Nive rivers. The positioning of the cavalry is indicative of the lack of involvement of the mounted arm in the campaign. This would continue throughout the campaign and is one of the causes for Soult's ultimate failure. To control his army, he established his headquarters at Bayonne.⁶³ (See figure 4.)

Allied Dispositions and Plans

The Anglo-Allied army faced the French while Wellesley made plans to advance into France. Wellesley positioned his forces to cover all the passes along the eastern side of the Pyrenees. Due to the anticipated threat, he wieghted the army towards the St. Sabastian side of the sector and stretched approximately 40 miles from Roncesvalles on the southeast, to the city of Irun along the Bay of Biscay. Wellesley's army consisted of eight British Divisions, one Portuguese division and

Freye's Fourth Spanish Army. Wellesley deployed these forces to cover the three principle avenues of approach into Spain: The coastal approach, the Maya Pass and the Roncesvalles Pass.

Wellesley's organization for the defense consisted of a covering force, defending the three major approaches to Spain, a siege operation at San Sabastian and a blockading force at Pampeluna. A British infantry brigade under General Byng, from the Second Division, was posted on the far right of the Anglo-Allied positions, covering the approaches to Roncesvalles. To the left of Byng's Brigade was a British brigade under Cambell around Alduides. To the rear of both of these brigades, in a supporting role, was Cole's Division at Viscayet halfway between Roncesvalles and Zubiri. General Hill occupied the center of the Anglo-Allied positions with the Second Division and elements of the Portuguese Division under Silveira in the Batzan Valley. Stationed to the rear of Hill, at Olague, was the Third Division under General Picton acting as a reserve for the area ready to support either Generals Hill or Cole.⁶⁴

To the left of Hill, in the town of Echallar, was the Seventh Division and to the north east was the Light Division in the town of Vera. Providing support to the center of the army was the Sixth Division of Clinton at Estevan in the Batzan Valley.

The Spanish elements of the army occupied the left or Northwestern portion of the line. The Spanish Division under Longa was positioned along the Bidassao river responsible for the crossing sites. To the left of Longa, constituting the extreme left of the Allied position, was the Division of Giron along the road running from Irun

south to St. Sebastian. Wellesley positioned the main body of his cavalry around Teffala to the rear of his army.⁶⁵ Wellesley established his headquarters at Lesaca behind the Seventh and Light Divisions.⁶⁶ (See figure 5.)

Wellesley was convinced that he could hold the passes of the Pyrenees and eventually advance into France. He wrote to Lord Bathurst on 2 July 1813 that " I think I can hold the Pyrenees as easily as I can Portugal,"⁶⁷ However, before he could advance into France it was necessary for the Allies to capture the cities of Pampeluna and San Sabastian in order to secure the lines of communication to support an advance into France. Pampeluna controlled two of the three roads leading across the frontier in the southern sector. San Sabastian controlled the only road in the northern sector along the bay of Biscay. Additionally, San Sabastian was a port city whose capture would help alleviate any supply difficulties the Allies might encounter. The capture of San Sabastian would provide better facilities for the disembarkment of supplies than the allies were currently using in the small port of Passajes.⁶⁸

To secure his line of communications Wellesley decided to blockade Pampeluna and besiege San Sabastian. The task of laying siege to San Sabastian was assigned to General Graham with a force of 10,000⁶⁹ soldiers and Wellesley's only siege train. Graham's force consisted of the Fifth British Division under General Oswald and the Portuguese Brigade of Bradford.⁷⁰ To alleviate the problem Pampeluna posed to his lines of communication, Wellesley assigned the task of blockading the city to the Spanish forces. Wellesley's plan was for the Allies to

secure San Sabastian, blockade Pampeluna and then organize for offensive operations into France. However, at the beginning of July 1813 Wellesley had not revealed what his operational plan was for the invasion of France. He was intent on securing his lines of communication and for this reason concentrated his attention on the siege from his headquarters in Lesaca.⁷¹

The dispositions of the Anglo-Allied army indicate that Wellesley was concerned with offensive operations by the French on his left. His left wing, to include the forces besieging San Sabastian, consisted of over twenty one thousand men. The allied center was twenty four thousand strong and could march to support the siege or fall on the flank of any relief force in two days march. On the other hand, because of intervening terrain and mountain passes, the center and reserve units would require three days or more march to provide support for the right wing of the army.⁷² Wellesley had weighted his left to shield his link to the ocean and support siege operations around San Sabastian. He expected Soult would attack to relieve San Sabastian. To Wellesley the town seemed ready to fall. Supplies appeared to be running out within the city, whereas Pampluna was well supplied. Additionally, allied spies reported that the French had positioned two pontoon bridges along the lower Bidassoa river, in an apparent attempt to prepare for a crossing.⁷³ Wellesley's preparations seemed reasonable enough based on the information available. However, as the succeeding operations illustrate, his initial preparations provided Marshal Soult with the most advantageous opportunity the French would have to win the campaign in the initial stages.

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⁴⁶Barthorp, 12. Graham's wife died while the couple were in Southern France vacationing. As Graham moved her body to England for burial, French custom officials opened her coffin searching for contraband. This incident so infuriated Graham that he became an ardent Francophobe, devoting his life to the destruction of any vestiges of the French Revolution.

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⁴⁸Barthorp, 11.

⁴⁹Chandler, Dictionary, 176.

⁵⁰Glover, 121-125.

⁵¹Barthorp, 12.

⁵²Glover, 229-241.

⁵³Hayman, 192-193.

⁵⁴F.C. Beatson, Wellington: The Bidossoa and Nivelles (London: Edward Arnold and Co. 1931), 24.

⁵⁵Beatson, 25.

⁵⁶Napier, 4:347.

⁵⁷Oman. Vol VIII. 537-540.

⁵⁸D. A. Bingham, The Correspondence of Napoleon (London: Chapman and Hall Ltd. 1894), 256.

⁵⁹Napoleon's Correspondence, Instruction adresse a M. le. Marechal Duc d Dalmatie, 7 July 1813 Napoleon to Lacue Correspondence 20229.

⁶⁰Beatson, 29.

⁶¹Bingham, 256.

⁶²Hayman, 194.

⁶³Beatson, 28. See also map opposite page 321 of Wellington's Campaigns 1808-1815, C.W. Robinson.

⁶⁴Napier, 4:353.

⁶⁵Napier, 4:346.

⁶⁶Glover, 248.

⁶⁷Napier, 4:227.

⁶⁸Glover, 248-249.

⁶⁹W.H. Fitchett, How England Saved Europe: The History of the Great War 1793-1815, 4 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons. 1900), 3:394.

⁷⁰Chandler, 399.

⁷¹Glover, 250.

⁷²Oman, 348.

⁷³Glover, 250.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CAMPAIGN: ACTIONS IN THE PYRENEES

Once the preparations for the counterattack were complete by late July the French began the final campaign for the Peninsula. Soult's attack surprised the Allies and the French forced the passes over the Pyrenees and advanced into Spain. Despite the initial success, the French were turned back at the two battles fought near Pampeluna. After retreating back into France, Soult established three successive defensive lines. Wellesley eventually penetrated or turned each line in a series of maneuvers until finally the French were forced back to Toulouse where the final battle of the campaign was fought.

The advance back into Spain by Soult's forces began on 25 July 1813 and lasted nine days. It ended dismally on 2 August with the French retreating into France to defend their southern border. Some of the fiercest fighting of the Peninsula occurred during this portion of the campaign as the two armies struggled to control the passes in ten separate actions.

The Double Battles of Maya and Roncesvalles

To implement his plan to relieve Pampeluna, Soult used Drouet's Left Wing to break through the Maya pass being held by Hill's corps¹ and capture the Velete pass. This pass controlled the access road over the Sierra de Aralar Mountains along the most important road for Wellesley

to move reinforcement from his left to support his right. As Drouet was fighting his way through the Maya pass, the Right Wing of Reille, supported by the Center Wing of Clausel was supposed to force the pass of Roncesvalles and march to relieve Pampeluna. This force consisted of six divisions.² The reserve of 15,000 men, under General Villette, remained along the Bidassoa river. Its mission was to retire to Bayonne if threatened by superior forces. However, if not threatened, General Villette was to advance toward the Roncesvalles pass and continue to Tolosa.³

This plan was aimed at achieving local numerical superiority at the passes. To prove successful it demanded that the French force their way through the passes before the Allies could move forces from their left to their right. This reallocation of allied forces would take up to three days to accomplish.⁴ By comparison, Soult's forces were only separated by a march of twenty miles and even in the mountainous terrain it would only require one days march for the two columns to support each other. Soult could potentially have concentrated his force, and achieved local superiority, for the critical first stages of the offensive.

Another critical factor affecting the French success was the availability of supplies. The French were to begin their attack with only four days of food. Soult relied on his force's ability to capture Pampeluna within four days and secure supplies through the city. However, even the planned four day's rations did not reach the soldiers due to poor supply arrangements, bad roads compounded by rains, and insufficient quantities of supplies. As a result, the operation began

with most units receiving only two days supplies and Drouet's wing having only one day's supply.⁵ This forced an even more critical need for a sense urgency on the commanders to achieve decisive results early in the campaign. If Pampeluna was not relieved in the first three days of the operation, force ratios and supply problems would force the French to retreat back into France to replenish supplies and reconcentrate their forces.

The French forces began to assemble on the 20 of July and by 23 July were in position to attack into Spain. On 23 July Soult wrote to the War Ministry explaining his plan:

I have just issued the last order of movement to attack the enemy--I propose also to manoeuvre (sic) so as to threaten the enemy's communication with Tolosa and Vitoria and so compel him to quickly retire towards the Ebro. The result of this movement ought also to relieve San Sabastian, and, unless I am mistaken in my hope, ought to compromise several of his corps.

By 24 July Soult had positioned over sixty thousand men and sixty guns to force the passes of Maya and Roncesvalles.⁶ On the 25 July 1813 at 1030 hours, the offensive began as Drouet attacked the Maya pass with 20,000 men.⁷

The Second British Division under the command of General William Stuart defended the Maya pass. On the morning of 25 July Stewart, not expecting an attack, had retired to Elizondo which was ten miles to the rear of his division's position.⁸ Stuart's command consisted of two brigades. Lieutenant Colonel Cameron commanded the 1st Brigade and Major General William Pringle commanding the 3rd Brigade. Cameron's Brigade was on the left covering the main road through the pass. They were situated on the forward slopes of Mount Alcorrenz with good fields

of observation. Pringle's Brigade was on the right covering the alternate road one mile to the east with an area of defense stretching roughly two miles wide. Total forces for the two brigades numbered close to six thousand effectives.⁹

Drouet's force surprised the British forces of Stewart who were guarding the pass. The British pickets spotted the French at dawn approaching an adjacent hill but the only action taken was to reinforce the line with the recall of some light companies; an insufficient precaution given the nature of the force approaching. As Captain Sherer, who was in charge of the picket forces, states in Recollections From the Peninsula, "The light companies were ordered up. . . . In less than two hours my picquet and the light companies were heavily engaged. It was a surprise and not a surprise." The picket's fire alerted the remaining British forces who were below the crest. They immediately moved to retake the pass from Drouet's forces.¹⁰

The French forces continued to attack through the pass and the two British Brigades were unable to force them back. However, the narrowness of the terrain prevented the French from bringing their advantage in numbers to bear and the struggle continued through the morning. General Stuart arrived in the afternoon and ordered the remaining British forces to a position below the crest of the pass. As the British retired, the French immediately took advantage of the break in contact and moved to overwhelm the outnumbered defenders. General Stuart was wounded in the ensuing combat but was able to send for help from the Seventh Division stationed at Echallar further to the west. The struggle for the pass continued and the French continued their

advance and captured the Portuguese artillery providing support to the British. Stewart's forces were beginning to run out of ammunition around 1800 hours and the situation looked very bleak for the remaining forces as a brigade under General Barnes of Seventh Division arrived. Barnes attacked the French right flank and stalled the attack.¹¹ The arrival of reinforcements stabilized the situation and allowed the Allies to hold out until nightfall. As the fighting died down due to darkness, Hill arrived on the scene and ordered Stewart to retire to positions around Elizondo.¹² French losses amounted to 1,500 men and the Allies lost 1,400 and four guns.¹³ Drouet had captured the pass of Maya but his victory was incomplete.

Although the French physically occupied the terrain after the engagement, the result did not really seriously damage the Allied position. Drouet however, fearing a counter attack by a reinforced Stewart, recalled his lead divisions to concentrate at the pass. After the battle he remained in this position for twenty hours without advancing to maintain contact with the forces to his front.¹⁴

Drouet wasted the entire day of the 26th without pressing forward. He was concerned about his right flank being attacked and was unaware, until the morning of the twenty sixth, that the British had withdrawn to Elizondo.¹⁵ Drouet has been criticized for not following up his seizure of the passes and attacking the British at Elizondo. This criticism is partially warranted. His delay at Maya did contradict the essence of Soult's plan which was predicated on a quick seizure of the passes and the relief of Pampeluna. However, more important than the delay, was the resultant loss in contact between Drouet's forces and

the British. The new position occupied at Elizondo still allowed the British to defend the entrance to the Batzan valley which was the real purpose of Hill's defense at Maya. Drouet should have maintained the pressure on the British as they withdrew from the Maya to take up new positions around Elizondo. This would have had several adverse effects on the British. Drouet's numerical advantage could have been pressed as the Allies retreated. The area around Elizondo would have allowed the deployment of more of the French than the Pass of Maya offered. More importantly, if Drouet could have forced the British out of Elizondo he would have hindered Wellesley's ability to move soldiers to support his right flank at Roncesvalles. If the French could have controlled the Batzan Valley Wellesley, would have had to move soldiers along the more circuitous route from St. Sabastian to Pampeluna instead of through the valley. This would have effectively delayed reinforcement of the right flank for a least another day. This delay would have allowed the forces of Soult's left flank to overwhelm the outnumbered Anglo-Allies defending Pampeluna.

While Drouet was forcing the pass at Maya, Marshall Soult was involved in the action at the pass of Roncesvalles directing the efforts of Reille and Clausel. The Roncesvalles pass consists of two ridges running parallel to each other in a north-northeastern direction. Two roads run along each ridge at approximately a mile apart. The main road, originally constructed by the Romans, is on the eastern ridge connecting St. Jean de Port to Pampeluna. The other road through the pass runs along the western ridge and is no more than a goat trail.¹⁶

Soult's plan for attack was for Clausel's Center Wing to advance along the eastern road to force the pass. Supporting Clausel's attack would be the Right Wing of Reille advancing along the goat trail. The entire force consisted of six divisions of over forty thousand soldiers.¹⁷

Wellesley entrusted the defense of the Roncesvalles pass to General Cole of the Fourth Division, consisting of Ross' and Anson's Brigades, supplemented by elements of the Second Division and a Spanish contingent. Byng's Brigade of the Second Division, consisting of 2,000 men, defended the main road through the pass. The western road was defended by a Spanish Brigade of 3,500 men, under General Morillo and the 1/57th British Battalion which occupied the village of Valcarlos half a mile northeast of Byng's position. To the south of the pass occupying the village of Roncesvalles was Anson's Brigade. Approximately two miles southeast of Roncesvalles, in the village of Burguete, was Ross' Brigade. Total Anglo-Allied strength in the pass was only 5,500 men, with a total strength of all brigades being 13,000 men. Two miles west of the pass was Cambell's Portuguese Brigade of 2,000 men, however, this brigade was under control of General Hill who was responsible for the Batzen valley.¹⁸ (See Map 5)

At 0600 hours on 25 July 1813 Clausel's Center Wing of twenty thousand men advanced along the eastern main road. Clausel's lead division under General Vandermaesen, attacked Byng's Brigade. The terrain favored the defenders and the British were able to hold up Clausel's advance for four hours. However, after the first repulse, Clausel attacked again at 1500 and forced Byng's men back to the

Altobiscar Mountain. While this was a stronger defensive position, it uncovered the right flank of the main Anglo-Allied position.

As Clausel advanced on the eastern ridge, Reille moved his Wing along the western ridge following the goat trail to Burguete which was on the main road to Pampeluna. Reille was able to by-pass Morillo's Spanish force and the supporting British Battalion at the village of Vilcarlos. However, at 1400 hours, Ross' Brigade of the Fourth Division, which had earlier been moved north from Burguete, met Reille's lead battalion within the pass. Due to the narrowness of the terrain, only one battalion could be deployed on each side. This negated the French numerical advantage and Ross was able to halt Reille's advance. At 1600 hours a fog enveloped the pass and reduced visibility to twenty yards which prevented further fighting. Neither Reille or Clausel had reached within one mile of the pass of Roncesvalles. After the arrival of the fog, matters took a turn for the worse for the British. Even though the fighting had ceased, General Cole was worried that the French numerical superiority would eventually overcome his position. Because of this he ordered a withdrawal to Pampeluna.¹⁹

Wellesley was with Hill at Elizondo preparing the defensive positions to meet Drouet's column as it moved down the Batzen valley when he received word of Cole's retreat to Pampeluna. It was 2000 hours on 26 July when he received the news.²⁰ Prior to this, Wellesley had finally determined that Soult's offensive was aimed at relieving Pampeluna and not St. Sabastian as he had previously thought. This realization forced him to order a major repositioning of forces. He ordered the Seventh Division, which was at Echallar, and the Light

Division at Vera, to retire to the southeast to support Hill around Elizondo. Additionally, he ordered the Spanish force blockading Pampeluna to detach a division to be used by Picton, who was northeast of Pampeluna. He also moved the Sixth Division from Estavan south through the Lanz valley towards the village of Sorauren. A move that would be critical to the battle to be fought there on the 28 July. After receiving the word that Cole had retired to Pampeluna he immediately sent orders for Picton and Cole to defend east of Zubiri. Wellesley was concerned that his subordinates were retiring too quickly, abdicating good defensive positions to the enemy. After ensuring that Hill had the affairs in the Batzen in hand, Wellesley departed for his right flank to see for himself what the situation was around Pampeluna.²¹

At Roncesvalles the mist helped cover the Allied withdrawal so that Cole's departure was not noticed by Soult until dawn of the 26 July. Soult dispatched Clausel's Wing in pursuit but the French did not regain contact until 1600 hours on 26 July. This occurring at the village of Linzoain which was still fifteen miles from Pampeluna.²² Once the rear guard was located, the French forces pressed on towards Pampeluna. The French followed the Allies to positions northeast of Pampeluna to the area around Sorauren. Soult arrived with the 30,000 men of his combined wings on the morning of the 27 July.²³

Time was running out for the French. They had commenced the campaign with less than four days rations. The activities in the pass had already consumed more time and supplies than planning had accounted for. Additionally, with each passing moment, the surprise Soult had

obtained in the initial onslaught became less important as Wellesley repositioned forces from his left to his right. It was becoming more important for a successful campaign for Soult to obtain a decisive battle to relieve Pampeluna. As Soult approached the area around Sorauren these thoughts were surely in his mind.

The First Battle of Sorauren

The Battle of Sorauren occurred east of the city that bears its name. The area consists of two parallel ridges running east west approximately two kilometers from each other. The southern ridge is approximately 2,000 meters high and about a mile and a half in length. Running perpendicular to each ridge are two roads and rivers approximately six to seven kilometers on each flank. Along the east is the Arga river and the Roncesvalles to Pampeluna road while along the west is the Ulzama River and the road leading from Maya to Pampeluna. These two rivers converge just north of Pampeluna around the village of Huarte. The French approached from the north while the Anglo-allies took up positions on the southern ridge. (See Figure 6)²⁴

After Cole retreated from the Roncesvalles Pass, he took up a strong position 10 miles southeast of the pass just east of Zubrini. Picton joined Cole at this point with his 3rd Division. Since Picton was the senior of the two, he took control and determined that a further retreat was in order and moved both divisions further southeast to occupy positions near Pampeluna. This in effect further isolated the two divisions from the right. Cole deployed his Division along the southern ridge refusing his left. He deployed Vasconcello's brigade to the far left at a ninety degree angle to his main line. His main line

consisted of Ross' brigade to the left and Anson's to the right. Supporting Cole on the ridge were Cambell's Portuguese Brigade in the center, between Ross and Anson and Byng to the rear with elements of Morillo's Spaniards. To the rear of Cole, Picton deployed his division on a ridge that was three to four kilometers south east of Cole's position, refusing the Allied right. To Picton's left, Morillo deployed the remainder of his Spanish soldiers.²⁵ Picton was in charge of the area until the arrival of Wellesley.

Wellesley arrived from Elizondo at Sorauren along the road from Ostiz on the morning of the 27 July. From his position he was in danger of being captured by the French as he was actually forward of the Allied lines. However, from his vantage point he could see that he would have to redirect the 6th Division to the battlefield. This was because their current route from Echallar would bring them into the rear of the French positions and cause them to be separated from Picton and Cole's forces. He sent a dispatch off redirecting the 6th Division on a more circuitous route that would allow them to join up with the Allied left. However, this route would cause a delay and the division would not be available until mid morning. At the same time, Wellesley sent orders for the 7th Division to move to Lanz and the Light Division to move to Lisazzo.²⁶ Until the arrival of the 6th Division, Wellesley would have only 18,000 men to face Soult's 40,000 of Clausel and Reille's Wings.²⁷

Soult arrived north of Pampeluna with the three divisions of Clausel's Wing on the morning of the 27 July. Reille's Wing was following but had not arrived at the battlefield. Clausel deployed his three divisions along the northern most ridge north east of Sorauren.

As the leading elements of Reille's command entered the Clausel surveyed the field and urged Soult to attack the British as they deployed along their ridge. Soult refused, preferring to await the arrival of all of Reille's forces, even taking a nap as he waited.²⁸ As the remainder of the French arrived, Reille's Wing took a position left of Clausel with two divisions along the same ridge and occupying the village of Zabaldica. Reille's other division and his cavalry division were posted to the far left of the French position to face Picton on the Allied right. After the arrival of Reille's entire force on the afternoon of the 27th, Soult began probing attacks along the front to assess the strength of the allied position. After these attacks the French retired for the evening.²⁹

On the 28 July the French began the day with some demonstrations of their infantry and cavalry opposite Picton's division on the left of the French line. These demonstrations produced no results and it was not until afternoon that the main French attack began. Soult's plan was to attack the right center of the Allied position and force through to Pampeluna which was just outside of extreme cannon range of the British lines.

The French attack commenced on the right, with General Conroux' of Clausel's Wing, attacking south out of Sorauren. This division was met by the advance guard of Pack's 6th Division that had just begun to arrive to Cole's left. Pack's Division repulsed the first French attack with minimal losses. The French main attack commenced with six divisions throwing themselves against Cole's position and one division attacking the Portuguese to the left of Cole. The attack against Cole

met with initial success against the allied line, enjoying a two to one advantage in numbers. The French succeeded in reaching the crest of the ridge in several places until counterattacks, personally directed by Wellesley, repulsed them.³⁰

On the French left, the attack also met with initial success. The French forced the Portuguese off the ridge and continued to advance forcing back elements of Ross and Cambell's Brigades. But Wellesley was present at the critical time and again directed a counterattack by two battalions of Anson's Brigade against the French. This repulsed the attack. The French attempted to take the ridge a third time a few minutes later but failed again. This was the last action of the Battle of Sorauren as the French retired with over four hours of daylight remaining.

The Battle of Sorauren was over and Soult had failed to relieve Pamepluna. French casualties were near 4,000 lost with Anglo-allied losses being over 2,600.³¹ But the losses in manpower were not the worst of the situation for Soult. His supply situation was becoming more critical as each day wore on. The surrounding area could not support the foraging needs of his army and his four days supply of food was quickly running out. He needed to secure supplies for his forces.

His failure to relieve Pamepluna also placed him in a serious position politically. He could not retreat from his position without both serious political damage and adversely affecting the morale of his soldiers. Napoleon was expecting good news from the Spanish front to support his position in the east. He had hoped that a quick success from the Peninsula would help maintain Austria's neutrality and help to

discourage Prussia and Russia in their ongoing struggle.³² This was the primary reason for his selection of Soult to command his Spanish army. Militarily, retreat seemed to be the obvious choice. However this would also have serious detrimental effects on the army's morale. Soult had spent the better part of the month of July attempting to rebuild the soldier's morale and criticizing the previous leaders for the failure of Vittoria. A retreat at this crucial juncture of the campaign would likely be critical to future success.

Despite the problems Soult found himself confronting, he had no one to blame but himself. Soult's actions at the tactical level neutralized any operational advantage he had gained by his advance through the passes. He surprised Wellesley and arrived in front of Pampeluna with a numerical advantage large enough to defeat Picton and Cole. He delayed on the 27th, despite the urgings of Clausel, to press on towards Pamepluna and lost the advantage. To compound his mistake, Soult waited until after noon on the 28 July to commence his attack. This provided the Allies with just what they needed, time. This also was contrary to what should have been Soult's preeminent concern: his need for supplies. Time was on Wellesley's side. Soult's caution allowed Wellesley to await the arrival of the 6th Division which played a decisive role in securing the Allied left flank and the critical element that was the difference between victory and defeat.

A more serious issue concerning Soult's performance involved his overall objective. Soult's entire plan was focused on the relief of Pampeluna as his operational objective. This was a critical error. Soult's objective should have been the destruction of the Allied Army.

With the destruction of Wellesley's field force Soult could have then turned on the force blockading Pampeluna and relieved the city. Napoleon's orders to Soult called for the "reestablishment of my affairs in Spain." The destruction of the Allied Army would have accomplished that task. The Battle of Sorauren was the culminating point for the French forces. Faced with ever declining morale after this point, Soult never really again possessed the combat power to conduct offensive operations.

Regardless of the seeming urgency of the situation, Soult took little action on the 29th his last day of supplies. Leaving Clausel and Reille to watch the allies, Soult moved to regain contact with Drouet. Soult met up with Drouet's cavalry and learned that the majority of the Wing was at this time at Lanz 10 miles north of Sorauren. Discovering this, Soult determined that his best course of action would be to march to the west and attempt to relieve St. Sabastian.³³

This decision was fraught with risk and was more strongly influenced by political factors than military considerations. It required a major change in the line of operations for the entire army, moving from a north south axis to a generally east west orientation. Additionally, it required for the wings of Clausel and Reille to break contact with the British and move to the west. The fact that this could be successfully accomplished was a large assumption considering the French had just lost a battle. Additionally, part of the reason for having to relieve Pamepluna was the lack of supplies. The route to St. Sabastian was laterally across the Pyrenees which would take at least three to four days to traverse without opposition. Once the forces

arrived at St. Sabastian a battle would have to be fought to relieve the city. This would take additional time and Soult's supply system was already in shambles. A better option would have been to feint a movement towards the west and then bring Drouet's Wing to attack the rear of Wellesley's force at Pampeluna. However, this option was not considered and Soult's army began preparations to move west.

While Soult was making plans for his move on St. Sabastian, Wellesley was also positioning his forces for the next phase of the campaign. He moved artillery and ammunition to the ridge Cole occupied. On his left, Wellesley moved Hill and the Seventh Division from the Batzan valley to Olague where they provided support to the left of Cole's position. Additionally, the Light Division, which Wellesley had recalled on the 26th to Elozondo, was within supporting distance of Hill. Wellesley believed that he was sufficiently concentrated to assume the offensive. All he needed was the first sign of movement from the French to begin his attack.³⁴

The Second Battle of Sorauren

Soult's plan called for Reille to cover the army's withdrawal with two divisions defending Sorauren, while the remainder of the army moved west behind Reille's screen. This maneuver would concentrate his forces with Drouet's in the Batzan Valley for the move to St. Sabastian.

The Anglo-Allied attack commenced at dawn on the 30th July 1813 as artillery bombarded the French columns as they moved. The infantry followed the bombardment by assaulting all across the line attempting to prevent the French withdrawal to the northwest. The Sixth Division, now under Packingham after Pack was wounded earlier in the campaign,

attacked into Sorauren. Simultaneously, Cole attacked the northern ridge, while Picton assaulted up the Argus valley to cut the French off from moving west.³⁵

The Anglo-Allied attacks were extremely successful. Packingham almost destroyed the two French divisions defending Sorauren. The Third and fourth Divisions met with similar success as they defeated the final rear guard division Soult had ordered to cover the retreat. This division was forced back north up the Aldudes Pass carrying with it many stragglers from the other divisions. As the main battle continued around Sorauren, Drouet was battling Hill's forces in and around Lizaso. Drouet outnumbered Hill and pushed him towards Wellesley's main force. However, Drouet was not able to destroy Hill even though he outnumbered the Allies by two to one. Despite not crushing Hill, after Soult's defeat at Second Sorauren, Drouet's force was the only intact Wing Soult could rely on to cover his retreat into France.

The Second Battle of Sorauren was over by noon. Wellesley had achieved another success. Reille's Wing was almost combat ineffective and Clausel's fared little better.³⁶

The battle of had shattered Soult's plan to march on St. Sabastian. His only option now was to retreat back into France. He was cut off from the Roncesvalles pass but still had two options to pursue. He could move retreat through the Batzan Valley and use the Maya Pass the more direct route, or take the Echallar Pass back into France. Soult chose to use the Echallar Pass and began his retreat. Soult's forces fought one more engagement before entering France. This occurred when the Seventh and the Light Divisions forced the French rear guard

through the Echallar Pass. This finally concluded the French counteroffensive to relieve Pampeluna. The French had lost over 13,000 men from 25 July until 2 August when they reentered France.³⁷

Soult's counteroffensive had failed. Although it began very promisingly, by initially achieving surprise, he had failed to relieve the sieges of either Pampeluna or St. Sabastian. There were many causes for the failure. These ranged from inadequate supplies, failure of subordinates to demonstrate initiative and a flawed operational plan.

Soult began the offensive with only four days rations available for his army. This placed an undue time constraint on his operations and adversely affected the condition of his soldiers. As he started the campaign, he was forced to hurry his operations and make decisions that were too strongly influenced by time restraints. For example, when he initially began to cross the Maya and Roncesvalles Passes, bad weather delayed his advance for twenty four hours. This delay forced him to hurry his soldiers through the passes with forced marches that exhausted his soldiers because of the need to attain supplies at Pampeluna. Even the plan to attain supplies through Pampeluna was flawed. Soult was basing his operation on the ability to relieve a blockade of a city and then draw supplies from the city. This plan was not sound because of the supply problems inherent in a besieged city. If there are enough supplies in a besieged city to supply a field army one has to wonder about the necessity of relieving the blockade. The city should have had enough supplies to hold out on its own.

Soult's subordinates also let him down in the initial stages of the campaign. General Drouet is the primary case of this. When

Drouet's Wing expelled General Hill from the Maya Pass, he failed to maintain contact with the retreating British. Drouet did not aggressively pursue the British to the southwest. In fact, he recalled his lead elements back to the pass because he was fearful of an Allied counterattack. His lack of aggressiveness allowed the unification of Wellesley's forces in the vicinity of Sorauren on the 28 July. If Drouet would of advanced through the Batzen valley to control the area around San Estevan, the Sixth Division would not have been able to come to Wellesley's assistance during the First Battle of Sorauren. Even if the Sixth Division had slipped by Drouet's Wing, the French would still have been in a position to either march to Soult's aid or interdict the Seventh and Light Division's deploying from the northwest. These divisions arrived in the vicinity of Sorauren later to give Wellesley the forces he needed to force Soult back to France. However, as with all failures the commander must take most of the blame and the failure of Soult's counteroffensive is no exception. Soult failed to impress upon Drouet the importance of maintaining a bold, aggressive spirit filled with a sense of urgency in the completion of his mission after siezing the Maya Pass. Soult failed to pass on his operational vision to a subordinate tactical commander.

The most important cause for Soult's failure was his faulty force disposition. When Soult began the campaign, he stationed his reserve under General Villatte along the Bidassoa river. Villette's mission was threefold. He was to defend the crossing sites from an Allied crossing into France, to force a crossing if the situation presented itself and to secure Soult's line of communications. This was

a misallocation of forces and did not really support Soult's immediate objective. Soult's initial objective was to raise the siege of Pampeluna. He needed the maximum amount of combat power forward to accomplish this. Villette's forces were wasted in the rear area protecting a line of communication that was not critical to mission success or even supporting the main effort. The Reserve Division would have been better employed with the main army.

If Villette had been with the main army he could have provided Soult with a more favorable force ratio in the initial battles. While it is admitted that in mountain warfare the terrain limits the number the attacking force that can be brought to bear, Soult did not lose the campaign in the passes. The French were defeated in the setpiece Battle of Sorauren, not in the initial crossing of the passes. Villette's forces would have been invaluable at both Sorauren or with Drouet at the Maya.

Another flaw in the positioning of the reserve on the Bidossoa involved their mission to secure Soult's line of communication. There was no reason for Soult to be concerned with his line of communication. His forces were advancing with the only supplies he was going to have in the campaign. He was not going to receive supplies from France. His plan called for attaining supplies from Pamepluna. With these facts in mind the utilization of Villette along the Bidossao was pointless and a waste of manpower. Soult could have better employed Vellette's forces at the Battle of Sorauren.

The Tide Turns: The Allies Invade France

Soult's army returned to France to occupy positions along the frontier on 2 August 1813 in a state of disarray. The condition of the army was related in correspondence from Major Baltazar to the War Minister:

"I cannot conceal from your Excellency that the result of this unfortunate campaign has had a most mischievous effect on the spirit of the army in general, and the state of affairs has become even more unfortunate than after the retreat in June."³⁸

After reentering France, Soult deployed his forces from the Bay of Biscay to St. Jean Pied-de-Port covering a front of fifteen miles. Reille's Wing was along the right with Maucune's Division along the Sea to Biriattou and Larmartiniere's Division around Vera. Foy's Division which was officially part of Reille's Wing was separated from Reille in the retreat and took up positions on the extreme French left around Cambo on the Nive.

Clausel took up positions in the center. He positioned both Conroux's and Vandermaessen's Divisions south of Sar. Clausel's third division, under Taupin, was positioned to the rear of the two other divisions north of Sar.

Drouet's Wing held the left of Soult's line between Clausel's units and Foy's Division. Darmagnec's Division was collocated with Maransin's Division along the Harismendia ridge north of Ainhoa. Drouet's last Division, commanded by Abbe was positioned north of Urdax.³⁹ (See Figure 7).

Soult spent the major part of August 1813 reorganizing his forces again and attempting to replace the holes in the ranks with returning stragglers and new conscripts. About 7,500 stragglers had returned to the ranks by mid August.⁴⁰ However, after the series of defeats that the army had recently incurred, the morale began to suffer and desertion became a serious problem.⁴¹ The deteriorating physical condition of his army, coupled with the declining morale made offensive operations in the future particularly difficult and costly.

While Soult was refitting his forces, Wellesley renewed his siege of San Sanbastian. Through the efforts and direction of General Graham the siege of San Sabastian was brought to a conclusion when it was stormed on 31 August 1813 with a cost of 2,376 Allied casualties.⁴²

After refitting his army as best he could given the situation, Soult began to make preparations to renew the offensive. Since Soult was unaware that San Sabastian had fallen, the new offensive was aimed at relieving the city.

The final French offensive operation of the campaign began on the same day as San Sabastian fell to the Allies; 31 August 1813. Soult's plan called for a crossing of the Bidossao river at two points, by Reille at San Marcial and by Clausel five miles south at Vera. Clausel would turn north to combine with Reille and relieve the city. Drouet's Wing would stay east of the Bidossoa protecting the left flank.⁴³ It was a complex plan that involved a gamble that the two forces would both be able to force a river crossing and link up in the face of the enemy. As it turned out it was too complicated and failed, resulting in another double battle; the battles of San Marcial and Vera.

At 0800 hours on 31 August, Reille's Wing of three divisions advanced across the Bidossao river in the vicinity of Behobie and moved up the slopes of San Marcial ridge one mile south of the river. The ridge, which was crowned by the San Marcial Monastery, was defended by the three Spanish divisions of General Freire. To the rear of Freire was Longa's Spanish division and the British First Division and Aylmer's British Independent Brigade. These later units did not actually participate in the fighting, however their presence did effect the French options for attack.⁴⁴

The French attacked the ridge before all of the French units were across the river and the supporting artillery was in place. Soult directed the attack with only two of the planned three divisions. They moved up the ridge and were met by the Spanish with disciplined volleys from behind prepared positions. The French were easily repulsed with heavy casualties. With the arrival of the third division, Soult rallied his forces and at about noon attacked again only to be forced back by the Spanish. Soult again tried to rally the shaken troops but could not organize a third attack. Casualties for the French were 2,500 with the Spanish losing 1,700.⁴⁵

While Soult attacked at San Marcial, Clausel commenced the attack across the Bidossoa in the vicinity of Vera with his Wing of four divisions. He detailed one division to stay on the north side of the river guarding his left flank from the Light Division that was watching the crossing from the south. He forced a crossing with the remaining three divisions. After crossing the Bidossoa, one division moved to the north to protect the right flank of the other two divisions moving to

the east. The other two divisions were met by a British Brigade of the Seventh Division and a Portuguese Brigade of the Fourth Division. The French attack stalled and degenerated into a frontal attack where British firepower prevailed. A general combat ensued which lasted until nightfall when Clausel ordered a withdrawal on Soult's orders which had arrived after Soult's repulse to the north. French casualties were 1,300 men while the Allies lost 850 men.⁴⁶

The last major offensive of the French in the Peninsular war had failed completely. Causes for the failure range from tactical blunders to a flawed operational plan governed by strategic and political pressures.

At the tactical level Soult committed his forces to frontal assaults that possessed little chance of success. The Spanish positions at San Marcial were well fortified and prepared. Additionally, the attacks were not well coordinated. Soult assaulted the Spanish position without adequate artillery support. The artillery had not even crossed the river before Soult began his advance.

Tactical inefficiency also characterized the action at Vera. Clausel was forced to assault British forces defending bridge and ford sites. This prevented any sort of maneuver. The attacks were made head long right into the teeth of the Allied strength. The resulting repulse was accomplished without the benefit of the British units that observed the battle from afar: The British Light Division and the Seventh Division. Clausel never really possessed the force ratio to succeed without maneuvering.

Even if the initial assaults had proved successful, Soult's plan was too complicated. It called for two diverging attacks involving river crossings, separated by five miles of restrictive terrain. After the initial river crossings, the converging forces were expected to link up in the face of the enemy and then begin their advance towards San Sabastian. This plan failed to take into account the actions of the Allies. It also would have proven impossible to coordinate the two attacks. If one failed as it did, and the other proved successful the successful wing would have been isolated on the Allied side of the river without friendly support. A better plan would have been to conduct a demonstration at one crossing site while forcing the other site with the majority of forces left available.

Despite the tactical failures and complexity there are more significant reasons for the failure. Soult appeared reluctant to resume the offensive, after his repulse in late July, and with good reason. His soldiers' morale had suffered severely from the July actions, while that of the Allies was improving. Additionally, Allied replacements continued to arrive while the French ranks were dwindling due to desertion.⁴⁷ Because of the recent influx of replacements and recovering of wounded from the Vitoria campaign, Wellesley was able to report back to England on 25 August that he "did not doubt that we are now as strong as we were on the 25th of last month."⁴⁸ From a purely military standpoint, the French were outclassed in both numbers and morale. There seemed no valid military reason to attempt another offensive until the army could be reconditioned. However, strategic

political considerations influenced Soult to take action before it was militarily feasible to do so.

Napoleon had sent Soult to Spain to produce successes which the Emperor hoped would influence the overall strategic situation. The Armistice of 1813 after the Battle of Bautzen, was concluded on June 2 1813. At that time the French were at war with all the major powers except Austria.⁴⁹ Napoleon hoped that a victory from Spain would discourage Austria from entering the war against France. Soult's failure in his counteroffensive in July helped produce the opposite effect and Austria declared war on France on 12 August 1813. Napoleon desperately needed some sort of success in the west to help his operations in the east against all of Europe. A sense of the pressure from Paris is evident in a dispatch from the War Minister to Soult in response to Soult's earlier dispatches ". . . his Majesty will be astonished to receive the news of your return to the frontier without any details of your plans regarding the besieged places."⁵⁰ Even Soult's requests for further orders and reinforcements during this time were ignored. Napoleon's earlier orders still stood and the Emperor expected results. The strategic situation dictated Soult's operational course of action which meant he had to attack.

The failure of the second French counteroffensive, coupled with the declaration of war by Austria, clearly shifted the momentum to the Allied forces along the Spanish Frontier. Although Soult was in no condition to execute the Emperor's demands, Wellesley was still cautious about advancing too deeply into France. He was concerned that Napoleon would defeat the allies in the East, conclude a separate peace and then

turn his army to the West to descend on the Anglo-Allied Army if it advanced too far into France. This concern was reinforced in mid-September when news of Napoleon's victory at Dresden reached Wellesley. Because of this, it was not until late September that Wellesley felt confident to advance into France to meet his obligation to the eastern Allies.⁵¹

After the Battles of San Marcial and Vera, Soult reoccupied his defensive positions between the Bidossoa and Nivelle Rivers. His position was intersected by rough terrain which made it strong defensively but hampered lateral communications. Soult's forces were not large enough to defend along the entire line. Because of this, he had requested permission from Paris to move towards Bayonne to shorten his line to a more defensible position. These requests were not only denied but responded to with admonitions from the Emperor and War Minister to attack.⁵² Soult refused to conduct another attack and opted to instead defend and improve the already existing redoubts that had been under preparation since the French defeat at Vitoria. Forced to defend forward by the strategic situation, Soult had to decide how to best allocate his strength to meet Wellesley's main attack. He believed that Wellesley's main attack would occur on the French left and made his dispositions accordingly. (See map 8)

Soult positioned Drouet's Wing, reinforced to four divisions of 14,000 men, on the French left. Drouet's headquarters was at Espelette. Foy's Division was located on the far left of the French line at St. Jean-de-Port. Abbe's Division was encamped between Espelette and Ainhoa with responsibility for defending the heights of Atchulegui, Chapora and

Mondarrain. To the west of Abbe was Darricau's Division at Ibarron. South of Darricau's Division was Darmagnac's Division along the heights north of Ainhoa.⁵³

Clausel's Wing, of two divisions of 15,000 men, held the center of the French defensive positions with his headquarters at Sare. Conroux's Division held the left of the Wing's sector defending the Vera and Echelar Passes with one brigade and the rest of the division in positions to their rear. To the right of Conroux was Taupin's division with its center occupying the Bayonette redoubt and positions running from Vera along the Col de Vera.⁵⁴

Reille's Wing, reduced to two divisions of 10,000 men, held the right sector of the French line with its headquarters at Urrugne. Mauceune's Division was in the first line responsible for the area from the Bay of Biscay to the Col des Poiriers. To the northeast of Mauceune in Urrugne was Boyer's Division. It was there to respond to events along the line on a signal from Mauceune and to continue preparing fortifications. This would provide Reille with a force to respond to unforeseen events.⁵⁵ Villette's reserve Division, reduced to 8,000 men, had the Spanish Brigade at Cambro, two brigades at Ascain, and one at Serres, in the right center of the French line.⁵⁶ The French forces spent September 1813 and early October preparing their positions for the anticipated Anglo-Allied attack.

The British were prepared to attack in late September. Wellesley realized that Soult planned to hold the entire line of the Bidossao river from Vera to the sea. He also realized that the French would not have the manpower to accomplish this and would be weak at

several points along the line. This made the French line vulnerable to a concentrated attack. He decided to attack along the coast where the seemingly uncrossable estuary would become fordable at low tide. This occurred on the 7 October.⁵⁷ Wellesley supported the main attack with another crossing on the right of his line in the vicinity of Vera.

The First and Fifth Divisions conducted the main British attack with the support of Wilson and Bradford's Portuguese Brigades and Aylmer's newly arrived British Brigade. Friere's Spanish Division was also available to assist in the main crossing. The First Division crossed on the left to secure the village of Hendaye and the Fifth led the crossing on the right to secure Behobie.⁵⁸ The total force making the attack was 24,000 men.⁵⁹ The Light Division, Longa's Spanish Division and two Spanish Divisions under General Giron would make the supporting attack. To prevent Soult from moving forces from the French left to support its right, Wellesley ordered the Second Division to demonstrate against Maya while the Sixth did the same against the Roncesvalles area.⁶⁰

The Anglo-Allied main attack fell on Reille's sector of the French line. The Divisions of Maucune and Boyer defended this area with Maucune's men holding the front line and Boyer's in the area around Urrugne, four miles east of the Bidossoa. Boyer's division was the largest of the two consisting of 6,500 men and was in Urrugne preparing fortifications. The brunt of the attack hit on Maucune's Division of only ten Battalions of which only five were in the forward areas trying to cover a six mile front.⁶¹

The Anglo-Allied attack commenced at 0725 hours on 7 October 1813 as the Fifth Division crossed the Bidossoa at three separate crossing points. They met light opposition and the three brigades easily forced the French out of Hendaye. They continued the attack inland securing fortifications two miles east of the Bidossoa and earthworks around Croix des Bouguets. On the right the First Division met with similar success, however it took them an hour to clear Behobie. After this, the French position was untenable and Maucune ordered a withdrawal to Urrugne. By 1130 hours the British had established a secure footing on the east of the Bidossoa. The Battle of Irun was over. The casualties were relatively minor with the Allies losing 400 men and the French losing 450 men. However, the loss was more severe for the French than the numbers indicate. They had lost all the guns of Muacune's Division and more importantly, had suffered another moral setback. Morale plummeted as the Anglo-Allied successes continued.⁶²

The secondary Anglo-Allied attack was in Clausel's sector of the French line, in the vicinity of Vera. Taupin's Division from Clausel's Wing, had fortified their area along the Commisari ridge, taking up positions along two parallel ridges running east west towards the crest of the Pyrenees.⁶³ The northernmost spur, known as the Bayonnette ridge, was fortified with two redoubts; the smaller Bayonnette redoubt and the larger Star redoubt to the east. On the southernmost spur the French defended a hillock known as the Hogs Back that controlled entry through the area. Along the crest of the Pyrenees in the south was the Rhune, a large dominating hill that the French strengthened with parapets.⁶⁴ Conroux's Division was to the southeast of Taupin's Division but was not

in the area when the British attack began and French strength was only 4,700 men.⁶⁵

On 7 October the Light Division led the Anglo-Allied attack at Vera with Colburne's Brigade advancing to secure the northern spur and Kempt's Brigade advancing up the southern spur. Longa's Spanish attacked in the center and along the left to secure that flank while Giron's Spaniards attacked the Rhune Hill.⁶⁶ Colburne moved along the northern ridge and cleared the Bayonette Redoubt easily and advanced to the Star redoubt. The Star was more heavily defended but the Allies once again forced the French to abandon the position after relatively light resistance for such a strong position. The French retreated to the crest of Pyrenees further east. On the southern spur, Kempt's Brigade secured Hog Back hill and forced the French back to positions adjacent to the Rhune.⁶⁷

As the Anglo-Allied attack commenced, Clausel realized the strength of the attacking force and ordered Conruex to move to support Taupin. Conruex complied and moved two battalions toward the Rhune.⁶⁸ Clausel continued to move reinforcements from his rear as the French were pushed to the east. As a result of these reinforcements, the Spanish attacking the Rhune failed to take the feature as night brought the fighting to an end. The next day the Light Division moved to the north of the Rhune and attacked it from the east forcing the French to abandon the crest of the Pyrenees.⁶⁹ The Second Battle of Vera was over. The French had lost 1,300 men and four guns of the 4,700 engaged while the Allies lost 850 of the 6,500 engaged.⁷⁰ More importantly, the

French had lost another engagement suffering another moral blow and the defense of the Pyrenees line had been pierced.

The crossing of the Bidossoa River firmly established the Anglo-Allies in French territory. The initial stage of the invasion of France was a complete success. The allies were successful primarily because Wellesley achieved operational surprise and tactical numerical superiority. For their part, French performance was particularly weak. Soult's plan was uncoordinated at the operational level and characterized by low morale at the tactical level.

Wellesley's plan for the crossing was carefully planned and executed and included a simple yet effective deception. He achieved operational surprise over the French by convincing Soult that the main attack would occur in the south around Maya or Ronscesvalles. He accomplished this by spending the last few days before the attack in the southern sector of his own lines making final preparations. While he was in this area he ensured that he was noticed by the French pickets.⁷¹ He also used the Second and Sixth Divisions in this area to conduct demonstrations. Wellesley's attention in this area, coupled with the activity of the two divisions, convinced Soult that the main attack would occur in the south as opposed to the north. This deception was particularly successful because Soult believed the south offered the best opportunity for the Allies. The appearance of the Allied Commander in the sector helped confirm this perception in Soult's mind. Wellesley's plan capitalized on Soult's preconceptions.

When the attack did occur, Soult was far to the south in Drouet's sector at the village of Ainhua. When he heard the gunfire

from the north he immediately set out for the fighting. By the time he arrived at Irun it was 1300 hours and the battle was over. Soult had been out of control of his force for the entire battle.⁷² In effect, the Wing commanders were forced to fight the battles of Irun and Vera isolated from the rest of the army. Since Soult was not controlling the battles each commander was left to his own devices to defend his sector. The reserve division of Villette was not moved to support any sector because Soult had to release reserve units to the wings if the units were to be employed. Wellesley also pinned each sector so that mutual support was impossible between the commanders. Drouet's forces were not engaged and Foy's Division did not move during the actions.⁷³ As a result, Wellesley was able to bring 42,500 men against only 20,800 defending French out of a possible 55,600 men available to Soult.⁷⁴

In addition to achieving numerical superiority at the critical points of attack, the morale of the French continued to hinder their operations. This was evident at the battle of Vera. The French were easily chased from their prepared positions without the tenacity one expects from troops in strong positions. Colburne of the Light Brigade told a story that illustrated this. As the 52nd moved to attack the Star Redoubt, the most heavily prepared position at Vera, he relates "To our astonishment the enemy did not defend their well-constructed work as determinedly as we had anticipated. Although they stood behind their parapets until we were in the act of leaping on them, they then gave way, and we were almost mixed together, till they precipitated themselves into a ravine and fled."⁷⁵ The morale of Soult's army continued to decline after each subsequent defeat and was now even

preventing him from successfully defending even entrenched positions. Conversely, the Allied Army's morale must have soared as they became the first soldiers of the Sixth Coalition to enter French soil.

After the Anglo-Allies crossed into French territory, there was another pause, this time for a month, as Wellesley assessed the strategic situation. He was once again concerned that Napoleon's success in the east would prevent him from advancing too far into France. Wellesley was also awaiting the fall of Pamepluna which would both secure his lines of communication and release more soldiers for offensive operations. Both of these concerns were lessened in late October when Wellesley heard of the French defeat at Leipzig and the capture of Pampeluna on 31 October.⁷⁶

The defeat of the French along the Bidossoa forced Soult to retire on his next line of defense. He moved his army to occupy a line roughly following the Nivelle river stretching from the sea to Armotz then bending east to the Nive River. It was a strong position with its right flank strengthened by the armed camp of Bordagain and its left resting on the Nive river. Several strongpoints were erected forward of the line to increase its strength. These strongpoints included the village of Urrugne, the chapel at Socorri and the village of Serres. In addition to the strongpoints several redoubts were built. The strongest was atop the Petit Larroun. It included three integrated redoubts and a fort. Stretching from the Petit Lourroun east to Armotz were a series of redoubts and further south were two redoubts, the Ste. Barbe and the Grenade Redoubt, that controlled the approaches to the center of the French line.⁷⁷

To man this line, Soult's forces had 63,000 men.⁷⁸ While this number seemed roughly equivalent to what the allies could muster, his most recent defeat had many repercussions on his Army's effectiveness. It had adversely affected his soldiers morale and had also impressed on his mind the vulnerability of his right flank. To try to encourage his army Soult placed a positive light on the latest setback declaring that 'Ultimately speaking I consider the events of 7 October profitable to us, because the army is more concentrated, and has its right wing resting in a much better position than before.'⁷⁹ Despite this better position Soult went through great measures to ensure that it was well manned and fortified.

To secure his right wing against another allied attack Soult positioned 25,000 men between the Sea and Ascaïn occupying the armed camp of Bordagain. Reille's two divisions, along with two Brigades of Villette's reserves, manned the armed camp. The remaining two brigades from the reserve, the Spanish and Italian Brigades, manned the armed camp at Serres and the two redoubts east of Ascaïn.

With the French right so heavily weighted, Clausel and Drouet were left with covering the remainder of the French defensive line. Clausel's three divisions, for a total of 16,000 men, held the center. His sector included the area from the Petit Lorroun to the bridge at Amotz. Drouet held the left of the French line with two divisions. His 11,000 men occupied a seven mile sector from the Nivelle to the Nive River.⁸⁰

Soult's plan was to buy time in his positions until the defenses of Bayonne could be strengthened. He expected the main attack on his

right. It was for this reason that he established his headquarters behind the Camp of Bordegain. From this position he could use the reserves of Villete to reinforce the lines all along the front as the need arose. The problem with this plan was that it abdicated to the enemy the initiative to attack anywhere along the line. This would force Soult to react to enemy actions with forces that were fast becoming unreliable. While this was undesirable, Soult felt he really had no other option. His army's morale could not stand another defeat and his further appeals to Paris, both to the War Minister and the Emperor, for reinforcements remained unanswered. To make matters worse, the War Minister pressed for Soult to again take the offensive. Once again Soult refused to take the offensive, thinking his only hope was to stall for time to allow the preparations of Bayonne to continue.⁸¹ The French would remain on the defensive, awaiting Wellesley's attack.

Remaining in a static position was a serious mistake for Soult. He did not possess the combat power to adequately defend his entire line and he would have been better served by shortening his line towards the coast. Soult could have accomplished this by moving both the wings of Clausel and Reille north of the Great Rhone. These wings could then be used to reinforce his right flank around the fortified camp and to establish a counterattack force. While this action would entail some disadvantages the advantages would outweigh the disadvantages.

While shortening his line would uncover the approaches to the Nive River in the vicinity of the Cambo crossing site, it is unlikely that Wellesley would take advantage of this line of operations.

Wellesley would not have advanced bypassing Soult's Army. This would have left too large a force in the Allied rear to interdict supplies and possibly counterattack into the Allied flank as it advanced deeper into France. Wellesley, while an outstanding commander, was not known for his bold, aggressive, offensive advances. In addition to his cautious nature, Wellesley's concern for the danger of Napoleon securing a separate peace in the east and turning the full force of France against the Allies in Spain weighed heavily on Wellesley's caution. Additionally Wellesley could not afford to split his army into two to pin Soult and advance. These factors would have allowed Soult to safely uncover the line of advance near his left flank by repositioning Clausel and Reille.

The repositioning of the two wings would also provide advantages to Soult. It would concentrate his forces to ensure a favorable force ratio at the critical point and it would help shore up his soldiers' morale. The morale would be strengthened through the assurance the soldiers would receive through the presence of their fellow soldiers. Furthermore, with these two wings as a counterattack force, Soult would be better positioned to respond to Wellesley's actions. He could then counterattack Wellesley's attacking force when it had culminated against the French defenses. This is more in fashion with French methods that had normally proved successful in the past.

Wellesley planned to capitalize on Soult's fear of an attack on the French right. He had observed the French preparations from his vantage point on the Grand Rhone and understood the significance of Soult's preparations at the Camp of Bordagain. He planned the Anglo-

Allied attack to consist of a demonstration in the north with a two pronged advance towards the French center left. Once the penetration was accomplished, he expected to be in a position to cut off the rest of the French army by turning northwest towards the coast⁸²

Wellesley chose General Sir John Hope to lead the demonstration in front of Bordegain. To accomplish this, Wellesley gave him the Fifth and First Divisions, the independent brigades of Aylmer's British, the Portuguese Brigades of Wilson and Bradford. Hope also controlled a British light cavalry brigade and a German heavy cavalry brigade. This gave him a total of nineteen thousand men and fifty four guns. Hope's mission was to demonstrate on Soult's right to prevent him from shifting soldiers to his left without becoming heavily engaged.⁸³ Between Hope's command and the Allied main effort were Friere's three Spanish Divisions. Frier's mission was to capture the Ascain bridge. (See map 9.)

Beresford and Hill conducted the main attack with over 50,000 men striking between Ascain and the Mondorrian mountain. Beresford led the main attack with the Third, Fourth, and Seventh Divisions attacking between the village of Sare and the Nivelle River. His 20,000 infantry would advance on a narrow three mile front. Beresford's left flank would be protected by Giron's Spanish Division moving up the Col de St. Ignace. Alten's Light Division was to attack to the left of the Spanish and secure the Petit Larroun. Hill's command of 26,000 men consisting of the Second, Sixth, and Portuguese Divisions, were to attack on the Allied far right to push Drouet off the Harismendia Ridge. Securing Hill's right flank was Morriilo's Spanish Division.⁸⁴

The Light Division began the Allied attack at 0600 hours on 10 November, by attacking the Petit Larroun Redoubts from the west. The majority of the French fortifications were oriented to the south so the western attack unabled the Light Division to outflank the redoubts. After the first redoubt was taken the rest were rolled up from the exposed flank. After two hours of fierce fighting the Allies were in control of the last redoubt by 0800 hours. The capture of the Petit Larroun cleared the way for the main attack of nine divisions on a five mile front.⁸⁵

With the Petit Larroun secured, Beresford's attack to the left of the Light Division, pressed on. By 0900 hours the Fourth Division had captured the village of Sare. Beresford continued to attack and by 1100 hours the French line was pierced in the center when the Third Division captured the Amotz Bridge. After pausing to consolidate on the Petit Larounn, and allow the divisions on the right to come forward, Alten moved the Light Division towards Amotz until he was stopped at the Signal Redoubt. Heavy fighting stalled his advance until the Signal Redoubt was also captured. This action sealed the French fate as the Allies rushed through the center of their line. While Hill's and Beresford's forces continued their advance the French right remained in their entrenchments of the Camp of Bordagain. Hope's demonstrations pinned Soult's right flank in place, preventing it from influencing the action. However, as Soult realized what was occurring in his center he ordered his troops to retire on the next line of defense. Soult's army occupied a line west of the Nive River near Bayonne and a bridgehead near Cambo.⁸⁶ Soult had lost another battle without being involved in

the movement of his forces. This one cost him dearly. French losses included 4,444 men and 69 guns. Allied losses were only 2,625.⁸⁷

There were a variety of reasons for Soult's failure to hold the Nivelle River line. His initial disposition of forces was flawed in a number of ways. Operationally he attempted to cover too much ground and spread his forces too thin to cover the area. Soult realized this when he initially occupied the Nivelle line. He requested permission from Paris to retreat further east to what he believed was more favorable terrain. However, as before with the Bidossoa River line the War Minister disapproved the request and Soult received no reply from Napoleon. Soult should have taken it upon himself to move to the east to occupy the line of the Nive River to shorten his line. This would have provided a number of military advantages. He would have been closer to Bayonne and the support this city provided. This included a garrison force of over 8,000 soldiers and the provisions of the city.⁸⁸ Additionally, his position would have been more defensible by anchoring the French right flank on the city of Bayonne.

Another benefit of the Nive River line was the terrain in the area. The flat terrain around the Nive River allows for the employment of cavalry. Soult could have used the cavalry to scout forward of his position to discern the main Allied effort. This would have allowed him to better position his forces to defend against this main attack.

The Nive river was also more defensible because of its breadth and width which was larger than the Nivelle. This made the Nive more of an obstacle to movement. It was fordable in a number of places but its

flow was somewhat unpredictable during the winter months due to the melting snows and frequent rains in the Pyrenees.⁸⁹

Another operational mistake Soult committed involved opting to defend a static, entrenched line in the first place. By doing this Soult abdicated the initiative to Wellesley. This allowed Wellesley to observe the French line (Which he did from a vantage point on the Grand Larroun)⁹⁰ and determine the weakness in the French disposition. Knowing these, Wellesley could then pin the majority of the French force in place by a series of demonstrations along the front and strike the decisive blow at the weak point of his choosing. This routine is the pattern that developed throughout this campaign. By assuming a defensive posture behind fortified lines, Soult played to Wellesley's strength, maneuver warfare, and negated the strengths of the French infantry, that is attacking instead of defending.

In addition to the operational flaws, there were a number of errors at the tactical level as well, that contributed to the French failure. Soult's inactivity during the course of the battle stands out as the most serious mistake. Soult positioned himself in the vicinity of the Camp of Bordagain and tried to control the battle from that location. Wellesley had observed Soult's preparations and understood the French commander's concern for his right. Wellesley had capitalized on this by ordering Hill to conduct his demonstration with two divisions in opposite the camp. This demonstration effectively pinned Soult and the forces in the camp in position. The demonstration so focused Soult's attention to the French right that he failed to move along his line to obtain a clear picture of the situation along the remainder of his line.

As a result, the Allied attack penetrated the French center before Soult could even respond to the situation. Soult's immobility also served to weaken the already declining morale of his army.

The morale of the French Army had continuously fallen throughout the campaign. While Soult attempted to raise morale with periodic speeches in the Napoleonic manner, these talks had only a temporary transitory effect on the men. Soult failed to realize the electrifying effect a commander's presence has on his soldiers. Seeing their commander in the critical place during the battle often strengthens the soldiers' resolve and courage. This is especially true with demoralized soldiers. The French soldiers defending the redoubts on the Petit Lourroun broke and ran without much of a fight. This effectively opened a gap in the French line that proved critical to the French defeat. Soult might have prevented this had he been actively moving along his Army's positions to control the fight and encourage his demoralized forces.

Another flaw in Soult's disposition was at the tactical level. He oriented the majority of his force in the vicinity of the Camp of Bordagain. This troop concentration included Reille's Wing and the majority of the reserve under Villele. This was in anticipation of an Allied attack into this area. A better disposition would have involved positioning the reserve in a central location around St. Pee. The positioning of a central reserve would have provided Soult with a mobile force to react to the Allied main attack once it was detected. Once again a large cavalry force would have been well suited to fill this role.

Despite the success in crossing the Nivelle River, Wellesley's advance stalled due to bad weather. Heavy rains commenced on 11 November 1813, one day after the crossing battles. The terrain in the foothills of the Pyrenees consists of a deep clay soil that becomes almost impassable when saturated by heavy rains. The only roads in the area that could sustain the movement of formed troops were the high road near the coast and the road to St. Jean Pied de Port. The French controlled both roads. The rains that occurred on the eleventh so saturated the ground that in the words of the Commander of the British 43rd Regiment William Napier "On the bye-roads, the infantry sunk to the mid-leg, the cavalry above the horses' knees, and even to the saddle-girths in some places: the artillery could not move at all."⁹¹ These rains stalled the Allied advance and as a result of a fog that settled over the area on the following day the French were able to move back to positions along the Nive river. Because of the continuing heavy rains Wellesley was forced to await dryer weather to advance. Thus, Wellesley did not resume the advance until early December 1813.

Defending the Nive River line; Operations December 1813

After retreating from the Nivelle River line, Soult occupied positions just south of Bayonne and stationed the remainder of his army along a line east of the Nive River near Bayonne with a bridgehead near Cambo. After being forced from two strong defensive river lines, Soult realized that a static defense along river lines was ineffective and a new approach was necessary. He determined to watch the river line with a small force and then counterattack with a larger force once the Allies

crossed the river. He hoped that in this way he would be able to separate a portion of the Allied army and defeat it in detail.⁹²

To implement his new plan Soult divided his army into two sections; a main battle line and a river guarding force. The main battle line consisted of Reille, Clausel and Villette around Bayonne and the other consisted of Drouet's forces along the Nive River. Soult placed Reille's Wing of two divisions and Villette's reserve on his right southeast of Bayonne where the Adour River meets the Nive River. Reille's area of responsibility was from the lower Adour to the St. Jean de Luz road which ran south-southeast out of Bayonne. Clausel occupied the left of the main French line with his three divisions responsible for the area stretching from the St. Jean de Luz road to the Nive River.⁹³ (See figure 10.)

Soult posted Drouet's Wing of four divisions near the village of Cambo four to five miles southeast of Bayonne. Drouet established a bridgehead on the west bank of the Nive occupying positions from Villefranque to Cambo. His mission was to advance and threaten the right flank of any allied force advancing up the coast to threaten Bayonne.⁹⁴

Wellesley planned to defeat the French by threatening Bayonne from the south and the east. The plan entailed a demonstration by Hope on the west side of the Nive driving north to Bayonne and two attacks across the Nive in the vicinity of Cambo and Ustariz. These two attacks were to advance up the east side of the Nive and attack Bayonne from the east.

Wellesley gave Hope a force of 30,000 men of the First, Fifth, Light Divisions and the brigades of Aylmer, Wilson and Bradford to conduct his demonstration. His mission was to protect the left flank of the Allied advance and demonstrate towards Bayonne.

The main attack consisted of a two-pronged crossing of the Nive River at Ustaritz and Cambo. Beresford was in charge of the force that crossed at Ustaritz which consisted of the British Third and Sixth Divisions. Hill crossed at Cambo controlling the Second Division and a Portugese Division.⁹⁵

Wellesley began his attack on 9 December 1813 by sending Beresford and Hill across the Nive river to attack the forces of Drouet. The Allies faced only light opposition and managed to push the French outposts back towards Bayonne. By the end of the day the Allies established advance positions near Bayonne where the Adour and Nive River run into the city.⁹⁶

This was the opportunity Soult had been waiting for. With the movement of Hill and Beresford across to the east bank of the Nive Wellesley had split his forces in the presence of the enemy. Soult could now attack an isolated element of the Allied Army. On the night of 9 December, Soult moved Drouet's four divisions from the east side of the city to the southern outskirts. Soult was thus able to concentrate nine divisions of 60,000 men and forty guns against the 30,000 men and twenty four guns of Hope's command.⁹⁷ Reille, with three divisions, was poised to attack along the road to St Jean de Luz while the remainder of the French attacked in the direction of Arcangues closer to the Nive River.

At 0900 hours on 10 December Clausel attacked down the Ustaritz road with his four divisions, pushing Hope's picketts back for approximately three miles. The Light Division stopped the French attack at the village of Arcangues. After the initial onslaught, Clausel attempted to maneuver to the left but was repulsed in the vicinity of Ustaritz by the Seventh Division which was posted to protect the bridge over the Nive. With the repulse of the flanking maneuver, fighting along the front waned. The battle lasted for six hours and exhausted the French. Their morale was not up to continuing the battle and each side settled into the positions they currently occupied.⁹⁸ The action was not a very serious affair. The French under Clausel outnumbered the men of the Light Division and the supporting divisions that arrived later in the day, but were reluctant to press the attack forcefully. Napier describes the intensity of the action.

The riflemen in the village and mansion held the enemy equally at bay, and the action . . . continued all day. It was not very severe . . . whereas the picquets (sic) only were forced back; there were no entrenchments save those made at the moment by the soldiers in the church-yard, and the French can hardly be said to have attacked seriously.⁹⁹

The low morale of the French soldiers was now seriously preventing the successful execution of a tactically sound plan.

While Clausel was cautiously pushing down the road to Ustaritz, Reille attacked along the St. Jean de Luz road with three divisions. The French pushed Hope's picketts back to the village of Biarritz where the independent Brigades of Cambell and Bradford halted the French advance. Reille then ordered one of his divisions to pin the two Portuguese Brigades while another French division tried to move to the east of the village. As the French division moved around the eastern

flank, the British Fifth Division, newly arrived from St. Jean de Luz, attacked and stopped the French. Not to be thwarted, Reille immediately dispatched the last of his divisions to the French left. They met with success until the last of Hope's forces, Aylmer's independent Brigade, stopped them east of Barrouillet. After this, the French attack culminated and all fighting ceased for the day.¹⁰⁰

Casualties for the battle were fairly equal. The French losses were 2000 men. Anglo-Allied casualties were 1200 men.¹⁰¹ The battle could, at best, be declared a draw at the tactical level, as each side occupied essentially the same positions as before the battle. However, at the operational level, the Allies were clear winners. At this point in the campaign Soult needed more than a draw to reverse his fortunes and the plummeting morale of his soldiers.

Wellesley had divided his forces in the face of the enemy, but Soult had failed to capitalize on the opportunity. Lack of aggressiveness and fighting spirit from the wing commanders down to the rank and file, coupled with the lack of cavalry were the fundamental causes of the failure.

Soult's plan was far superior to his previous plans involving static defenses of river lines. He attempted to use a more Napoleonic style of warfare integrating a counterattack into his defensive plans. This was sound. However, the morale of his soldiers was past the point where they could successfully attack even a hasty defensive position. In the case of Clausel's soldiers they were incapable of forcing an outnumbered enemy from an unfortified position. They lacked the elan of

previous battles during the Peninsular Wars that was even present as late as Sorauren.

The Battle of Nive was the first instance in the campaign where an effective cavalry force could have been used decisively in a set piece battle over suitable terrain. Prior to this the lack of cavalry had adversely effected Soult's ability to discern Wellesley's intentions. While this did contribute to French defeats, the lack of cavalry at Nive was sorely felt. During the action in Reille's front, a single squadron of French cavalry created havoc in Cambell's Portugeuse brigade and the 84th Line, killing the regimental commander.¹⁰² A larger cavalry force could have proved decisive. Soult was in need of a decisive victory and the lack of a large cavalry force prevented it.

After the Battle of the Nive River the end of the campaign was a forgone conclusion. It was only a matter of time until Wellesley would totally defeat the French and the remainder of the campaign was characterized by a relentless advance by Wellesley which ended with the surrender of Soult's forces at Toulouse on 12 April 1814.

Following his loss at Nive River Soult desperately needed a victory to shift the momentum from the Allies. Hill's force of 14,000 men and 12 guns on the western side of the river provided the French commander with the opportunity. Soult attacked Hill with six divisions of 42,000 men and 22 guns on the morning of 13 December 1813. The Allies occupied a strong position along a crestline flanked by two unfordable rivers. Soult was unable to dislodge the Allies and ultimately retired into Bayonne. The Battle of St. Pierre was the last battle of 1813 as both armies settled into winter quarters and prepared

to assume operations when the weather improved. Soult occupied Bayonne, while Wellesley prepared to lay siege to the city and continue his advance.¹⁰³

In February 1814 both sides resumed their operations around Bayonne. Wellington forced the French from the city and Soult retired towards Toulouse leaving a force of 14,000 men under General Thouvenolt in Bayonne.¹⁰⁴ As the French retired towards Toulouse, the operations were characterized by Wellesley maneuvering Soult out of each successive position much like the previous operations of the campaign. The campaign finally ended 12 April 1814 as Soult surrendered to Wellesley around Toulouse.¹⁰⁵

The campaign to defend Southwest France, as well as six years of fierce fighting in the Spanish Peninsula, was over. Soult felt that it was his finest campaign as he related in 1840. However, an assessment of the campaign does not really show that it was an operation that demonstrated his finest abilities as a commander.

Endnotes

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE ACCOUNTING

The campaign to defend Southwest France ended as a dismal failure for the French. What caused this failure? The correlation of forces was roughly equal throughout the campaign never significantly favoring either side. The terrain in the area of operations favored the defender. Additionally, all the commanders involved were seasoned veterans who were familiar with both their peers and adversaries. Looking at the measurable factors, it would appear that the French should have been capable of preventing the Allies from advancing into France. Nevertheless, the Allies defeated the French. There must have been other intangible factors that contributed to this failure. It is my contention that the foremost of these intangible factors was the leadership displayed by Soult, as demonstrated by his decisions during the campaign, his lack of vision, and the affect of the morale of his army on how he employed his forces in accordance with French methods or doctrine. Soult's leadership, while an unquantifiable factor, significantly contributed to French failure from 1 July 1813 until 14 April 1814.

There were many intangible factors that affected the performance of the French during the campaign, however, an honest assessment of the campaign must begin at the top with the leadership displayed by the general officers. Leadership played a critical role in the campaign both in the way Soult handled himself and the way his subordinates handled

themselves. Soult's performance was less than spectacular. He failed in several ways. He failed to translate strategic guidance into a successful operational plan, mismanaged the disposition of his soldiers, and made some poor decisions at critical times during the campaign.

Soult demonstrated a lack of ability to transfer Napoleon's strategic guidance into a successful operational and tactical plan. In the Imperial Dispatch assigning Soult responsibility as Lieutenant General in Spain, Napoleon directed him to reestablish the Emperor's affairs in Spain and to relieve the cities of Pancora, Pampeluna and St. Sabastian. Soult took these instructions literally and failed to adequately translate them into a workable operational plan in the manner of a traditional Napoleonic campaign. The essence of Napoleonic warfare was the destruction of the enemy army to impose Napoleon's will on the defeated nation. Soult failed to realize this in the campaign. Throughout the Peninsular War there were two obstacles for French victory: The popular insurrection of the Spanish people; coupled with guerrilla activities and the ubiquitous, but small British Army. In the beginning of the campaign, Soult had the opportunity to destroy Wellesley's army. However, he lost this chance at Sorauren. The operational surprise he attained over Wellesley, in his attack through the Roncesvalles Pass, came to no avail due to the hesitancy of Drouet and Soult's own vacillation at Sorauren. As a result, he squandered an opportunity that did not present itself again.

The failure in the early part of the campaign of Soult not properly translating Napoleon's strategic guidance into a sound, executable, operational plan with the right objective, adversely affected

the campaign in other ways. Napoleon's strategic guidance focused on relieving cities because of the political situation. Napoleon could not politically afford to relinquish control of any territory and the measurement of success was by the reacquisition of lost territory. Hence the directive to relieve Pampeluna, Pancoro and St. Sabastian. Soult should have realized that the operational objective was the destruction of the Allied Army and not the relief of insignificant geographic locations. This one perception adversely affected the entire campaign and played a key role in Drouet's performance during the initial phase of the campaign.

Drouet's performance during the beginning of the campaign displayed a lack of urgency and an overcautious nature. Drouet pushed a numerically inferior Allied force out of the Maya Pass and then lingered in the area for over twenty hours fearful that a counterattack was forthcoming. This hesitation allowed the Allied force, under General Stuart, to retreat southwest into the Batzan Valley, thus preventing its possible destruction. Drouet's hesitation was a critical mistake and hindered Soult's ability to position a numerical superior force against the Allies near Pampeluna. While Drouet was responsible for his delay in the Maya Pass, Soult must also bear some blame. As commander in chief, Soult failed to impress upon Drouet any sense of urgency to move through the pass and to interdict any Allied forces that would be moving from the Allied left towards the right. This was a leadership failure on Soult's part in that he did not impart his intent to his subordinates. However, it is once again inexorably linked to Soult's focus on the relief of cities as opposed to the destruction of Wellesley's force.

Another leadership failure on Soult's part involved his force disposition for his initial offensive. Soult's initial deployment of troops for his offensive was flawed. Soult was on the offensive in the beginning of the campaign but he did not concentrate his entire force in the decisive point. When he advanced with his army over the Maya and Roncesvalles passes, he left over 15,000 men, under the command of General Villette, guarding his right flank over the Bidassoa River. Villette's mission was to protect the French line of supply into France and to conduct a demonstration against Wellesley's left. This was a waste of manpower that Soult could have better employed in the passes. At the two battles of Sorauren on 28 and 30 July, Soult fought outnumbered and eventually lost. Villette's forces could have made the decisive difference on either day.

In addition to his faulty deployment at the operational level, Soult made some critical mistakes at the tactical level. One of these errors occurred at the first Battle of Sorauren which demonstrated Soult's lack of initiative, sense of timing and lack of confidence. On 27 July Soult arrived in front of Pampeluna in the vicinity of Sorauren with the three divisions of Clausel's wing. Reille's wing of three divisions was on its way through the pass.¹ Soult hesitated to attack the outnumbered Allies because of the cheering that Wellesley's arrival at the Allied position had caused. Soult was concerned that with Wellesley's arrival the Allies outnumbered the French and he opted to wait for Reille's forces. Soult even went so far as to eat lunch and take a battlefield nap awaiting Reille's arrival denying the requests of Clausel to immediately attack the Allies as they arrived on the field.

It is reported that as Soult settled down for his nap, General Clausel was observed 'leaning against an oak tree. . . beating his forehead with rage, muttering "who could go to sleep at such a moment?"² After his nap Soult still delayed until the following day and did not attack the Allied position until 28 July. This delay allowed Wellesley to bring up additional forces to offset his numerical disadvantage. This example illustrates that on this occasion Soult lacked Coup d Oeil as defined by Clausewitz. He failed to see the opportunity that presented itself. His delay allowed the arrival of the Sixth Division which proved crucial to Wellesley's defense. Soult failed to press his initial advantage at Sorauren awaiting the arrival of Reille despite the urging of Clausel and this tactical mistake effectively neutralized any advantage gained by his operational maneuver through the passes.

Soult abdicated the initiative to Wellesley once he lost at Sorauren and adopted a primarily defensive strategy. Once the operational momentum swung after Sorauren, the difficulties Soult faced were exacerbated by the French's inability to successfully defend static defensive lines. Soult initiated a purely defensive method of warfare occupying successive river lines. There are a number of problems with assuming this defensive method. It was contrary to what was at this time a successful French doctrine. It also abdicated the initiative to Wellesley and led to a terrain oriented defense as opposed to concentrating on the destruction of the Allied Army.

Defensive warfare was contrary to French doctrine. The French soldier was unsuited to operating only in the defensive. His training and doctrine emphasized the attack. He was accustomed to attacking in

column formation to break the enemy line. If this failed, he would then deploy into line and become involved in a sustained fire fight. There are very few, if any, examples in Napoleonic warfare where a French Army successfully defended a fixed fortified position. However, after Soult began to employ typical French doctrine at The Nive River battles, his soldier's morale was so diminished that they were not even incapable of attacking. They failed to press the attacks with the elan expected of the French and as a result the Allies withstand the attacks.

An unanticipated effect of Soult assuming a primarily defensive form of warfare is that it abdicated the initiative to Wellesley. Wellesley was extremely adept at positional warfare and the adoption of the defense by Soult provided Wellesley with a marked advantage. It allowed Wellesley to capitalize on his strength of conducting positional warfare. This was especially true when facing static fortifications. When faced with fortifications, the attacker can observe the position and discern a weakness. He can then mass his forces to pierce the line and exploit the gap created. Once this is accomplished, the attacker can then exploit the gap before the defender can respond, and the line becomes untenable. This is especially effective if the attacker can use a diversion to keep a large portion of the defender's force pinned to prevent it from responding to the attack. This is what happened to Soult at both the crossing of the Bidassoa and the Nivelle Rivers. Wellesley defeated Soult because the French commander adopted a static defense. At the Bidassoa Soult's defensive line stretched for over twenty three miles. He did not possess adequate forces to defend this line and Wellesley understood this. Wellesley's strategy for defeating Soult is

summed up in a conversation he has with General Colburne as the two officers surveyed Soult's defensive preparations:

These fellows think themselves invulnerable, but I will beat them out and with great ease It appears difficult, but the enemy have not the men to man the works and lines they occupy . . . I can pour greater force on certain points than can concentrate to resist me.³

This is the real essence of the weakness of assuming the static defense. It abdicates the initiative to the attacker. In this case Soult abdicated the initiative to a master of maneuver warfare and was defeated repeatedly.

Furthermore, the reliance on a static defense tends to over emphasis the maintenance of terrain at the cost of destroying the enemy forces, which should have been Soult's objective. A clear example of this is Soult's defense of the Nivelle River line in November 1813. Soult occupied a line running from the Fortified Camp of Bordgain southeast to the village of Sare then east to the the Nive River in the vicinity of Cambo. This line stretched roughly eighteen miles. He attempted to maintain an unbroken line along this position. Wellesley penetrated the line by using a demonstration on the French right and penetrating the French left center with the preponderance of his force. Soult based his defense on the maintainance of terrain. Once his line was broken the French position became untenable forcing a retreat. Soult should have shortened his line to the north around the fortified camp. He could have accomplished this by moving his vulnerable left wing towards the Bay of Biscay. This would have allowed him to establish a force to counterattack and destroy the initial Allied attack. Furthermore, this would have been more in agreement with French

doctrine or methods of warfare. Two of Napoleon's greatest victories, Marengo and Austerlitz were accomplished through stout defenses followed by violent counterattacks. It would have allowed Soult to concentrate on the destruction of the Allied army and not the retention of an inconsequential river line.

In addition to a flawed defense, Soult's leadership failure and lack of presence contribute to his loss. One of the most important leadership traits is the ability of the commander to be seen by his soldiers in times of peril and uncertainty. The mere presence of a commander in the midst of his soldiers can have an almost mystical effect, cementing their courage and resolve to face unimaginable odds and adverse conditions. This is especially critical when the morale of the soldiers is shaken or uncertain. Napoleon clearly understood this aspect of leadership as did Wellesley. Soult on the other hand, failed to take this into account and on numerous occasions was absent from the critical place of combat, often arriving after the battle had ended. Throughout the campaign, Soult is caught out of position in a number of instances, and in effect not being able to influence the battles in any way. Soult's inactivity during the tactical engagements stand out as a serious flaw in his performance at the tactical level. An example of this is illustrated by Soult's absence during the Allied crossing of the Nivelle River.

While defending the Nivelle River, Soult positioned himself in the Camp of Bordegain and remained there trying to control the battle from this vantage point. Wellesley had ordered Hill to conduct a demonstration opposite of the camp and this demonstration successfully

pinned Soult in place. Soult failed to move along his extended line to obtain a clear picture of the battle. As a result as the main Allied attack occurred along the French left center Soult remained in the camp. By the time he heard of the activity to his left the attack was completed before he even arrived in the area. Soult should have moved along his entire line encouraging the soldiers and inspiring them to hold on.

Soult's presence would have proven invaluable in raising the morale of his soldiers. As it was, without the necessary inspirational and charismatic leadership the soldier's morale continued to decline throughout the campaign. This declining morale hindered the Army's performance throughout the campaign. Because conducting an attack requires relatively more confidence or elan than conducting a defense, the Army's poor morale adversely affected Soult's flexibility in how he could employ his Army. During the later stages of the campaign he felt that he could only defend with his forces. Soult's presence and activity along the line during the battles would have helped alleviate the declining morale of his army by inspiring his soldiers.

One of the causes of the French failure was the shortage of an adequate cavalry force. This deficiency was something Soult could not influence however, it severely affected the conduct of his campaign. From the end of Napoleon's 1812 Campaign and throughout Soult's campaign, Napoleon continually recalled cavalry forces from the east to support his operations in the west. This initially occurred in February 1813 when Napoleon reconstituted his Guard and line cavalry regiments and continued throughout the time Soult was in command.⁴ In July 1813

Napoleon directed that Soult send large portions of his cavalry to the east while Soult was reorganizing his forces upon assuming command.⁵ Napoleon continued to remove cavalry forces from Soult's army throughout the campaign, convinced that the terrain Soult was operating in was inconducive to traditional cavalry operations. While this may have been the case in pitched battles it was not the case for their reconnaissance role. This shortage of cavalry prevented Soult from conducting vigorous and aggressive reconnaissance and assessing the main Allied attack on a number of occasions, most notably the defense of the Bidassoa and the Nivelle Rivers. At the Bidossoa River crossing, Wellesley crossed and attacked the French right, surprising Soult who expected the main attack on the left. Wellesley then surprised Soult again while crossing the Nivelle River. He attacked the French left center while Soult was concerned about the French right. On both occasions aggressive reconnaissance by cavalry forces might have discerned the Allied main effort and allowed Soult to reposition forces to counter the attack. Without the resources, Soult found himself at an even more disadvantageous position. Napoleon must share some of the blame for this deficiency. It illustrates the importance of a national leader providing adequate resources to allow the theater commander to accomplish his mission.

The Campaign waged by Marshal Nicholas Soult provides valuable insights for the military officer to help form a perspective on solving contemporary military issues. Commanders at all levels must be capable of comprehending the intent of their higher level commander's guidance or directives. Commanders must then tranlate that vision into a viable

operational plan and execute it at the tactical level. In addition, military leaders must be flexible enough to modify and adjust their operations to secure their objectives, while at the same time utilize their forces within their capabilities, capitalizing on their army's strengths, while minimizing their weaknesses. And finally, leaders must recognize that relentless energy and inspirational leadership coupled with the ability to visualize the decisive point on the battlefield are prerequisites for success in war. The personality and character of a leader and its affect on the soldier cannot be overemphasized. A leader cannot simply develop a masterful plan and relinquish the execution of that plan to his subordinates. He must be actively involved in all phases of the operation to ensure success.

Endnotes

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ORGANIZATION OF THE FRENCH ARMY OF SPAIN JULY 1813

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF: MARSHAL NICHOLAS SOULT

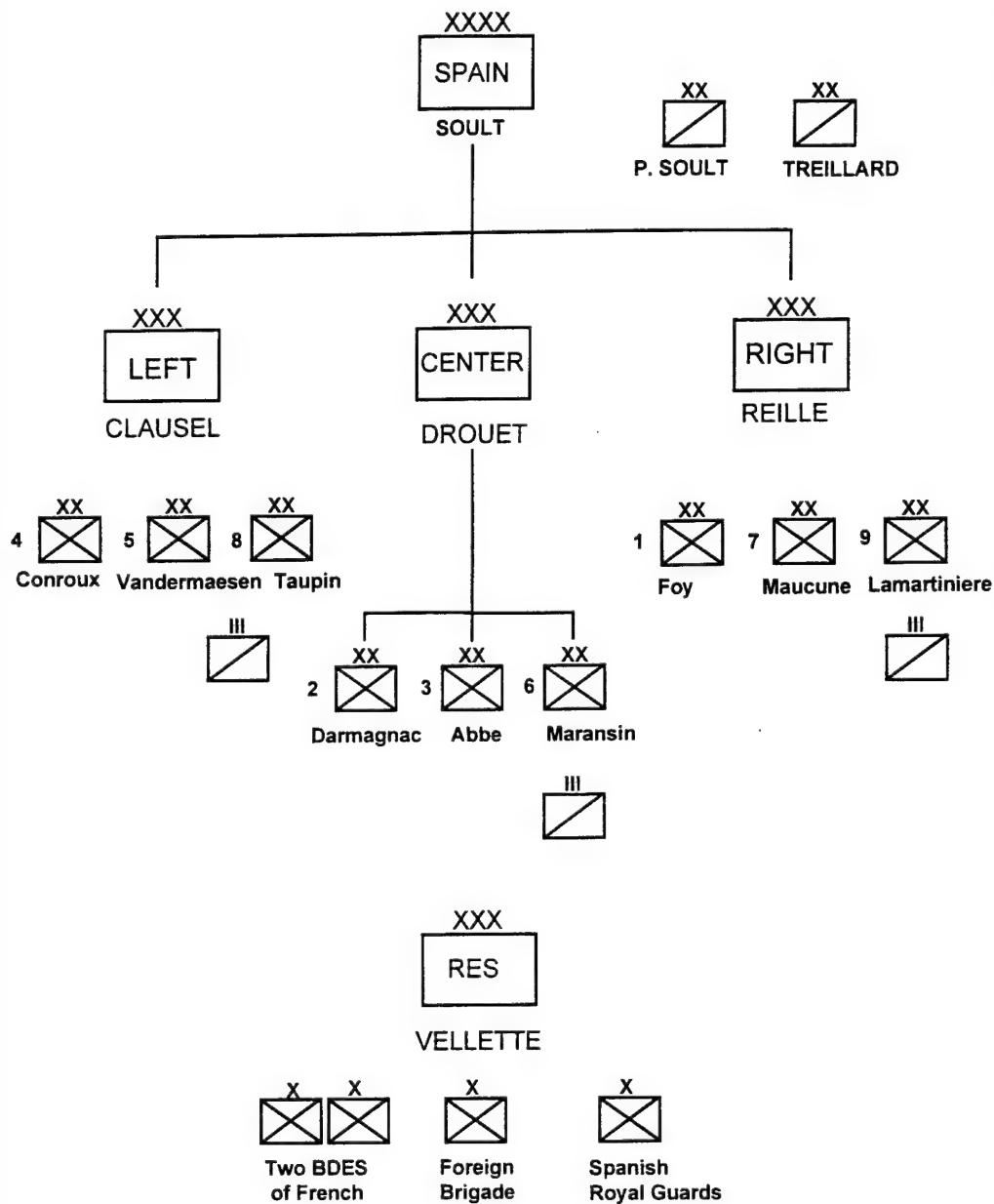


FIGURE 1

Source: Michael Glover, The Peninsular War 1807-1814, London: David Charles, Newton & Abbott, 1974. 393.

ORGANIZATION OF THE ANGLO-ALLIED ARMY OF JULY 1813 COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF: SIR ARTHUR WELLESLEY

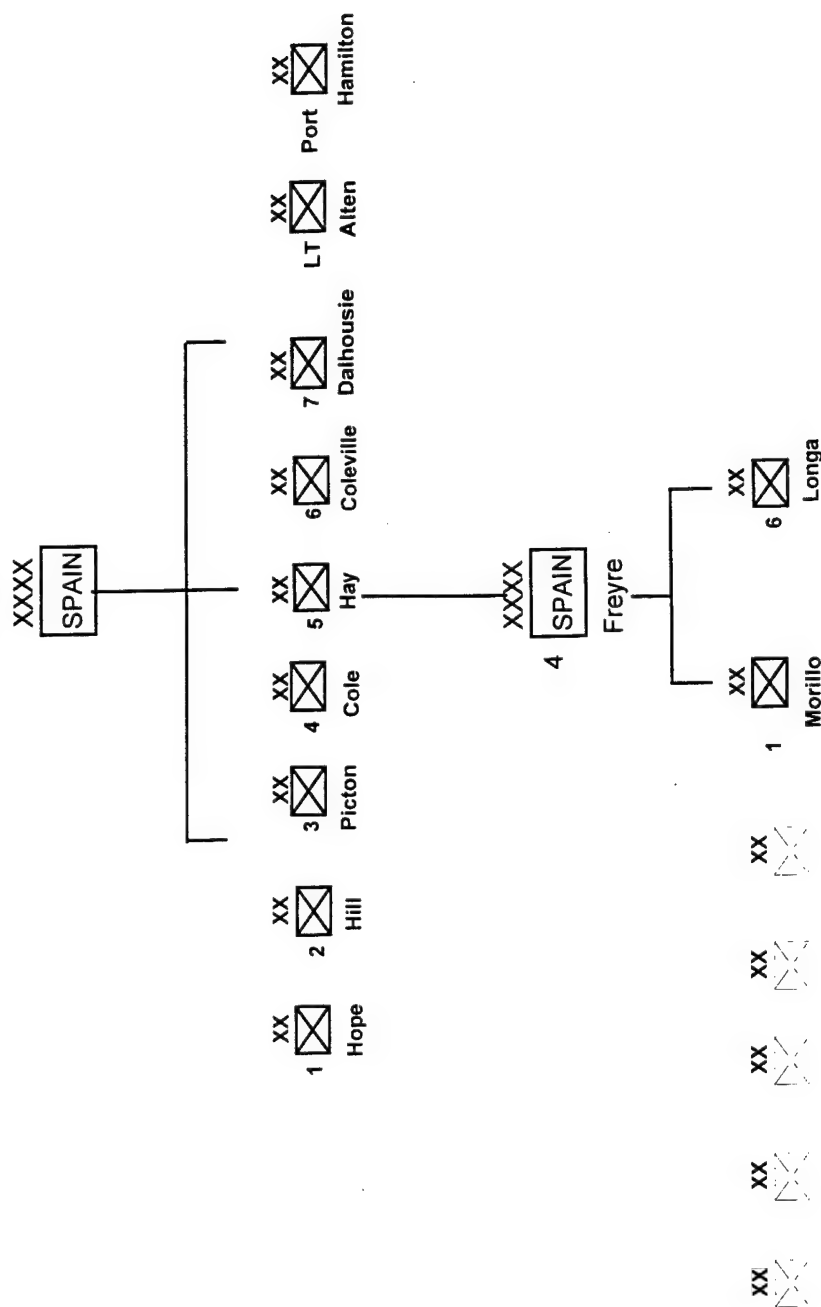


Figure 2. Wellesley officially commanded all of the armies in Spain. This included two field armies, 3rd and 4th and the Guerrillas of Navarre. While all the armies tied down French forces in the Peninsula the forces of the 4th played an active role in the campaign. Source: Charles Oman, History of the Peninsular War. Vol vii. London: Oxford University Press, 1930. 537-540.

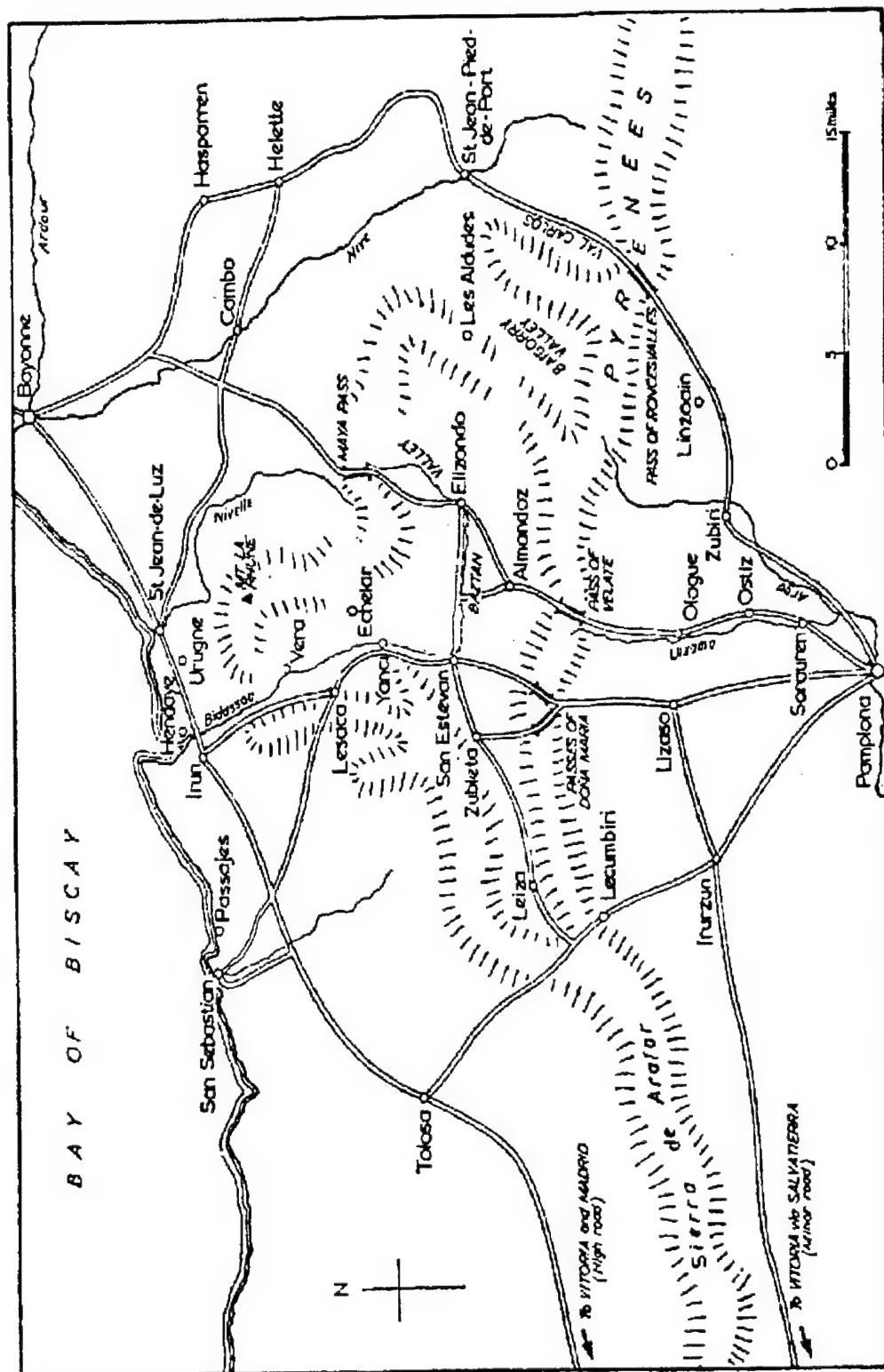


Figure 3. Area of Operations; Pyrenees Mountains July 1813-December 1814. Source, Michael Glover, *The Peninsular War 1807-1814*. London: David Charles Newton & Abbot, 1974, 258.

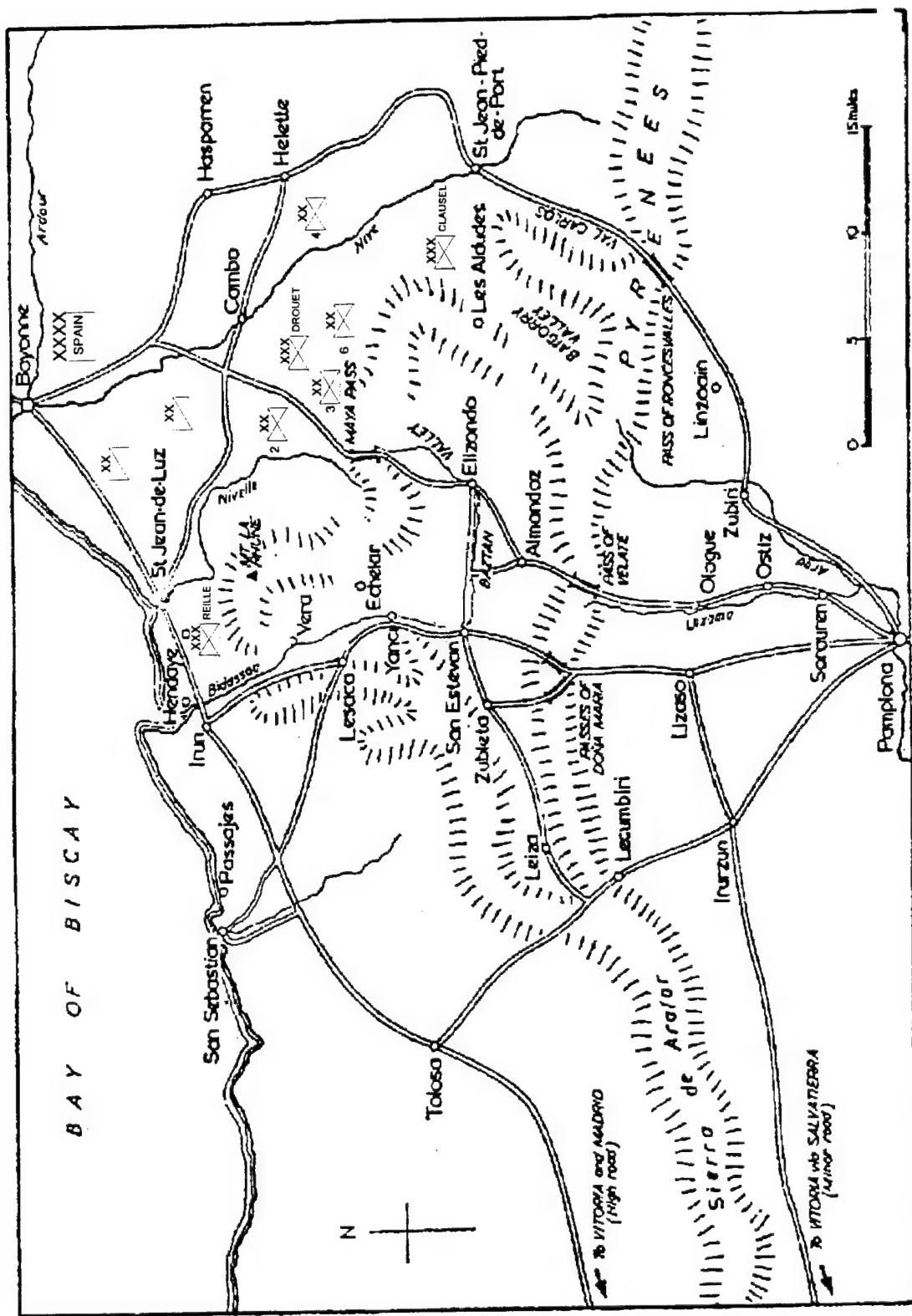


Figure 4. Disposition of French Army 19 July 1813. Source: F.C. Bealson, Wellington: The Bidassoa and the Nivelle. London: Edward Arnold & Co. 1931. 28.

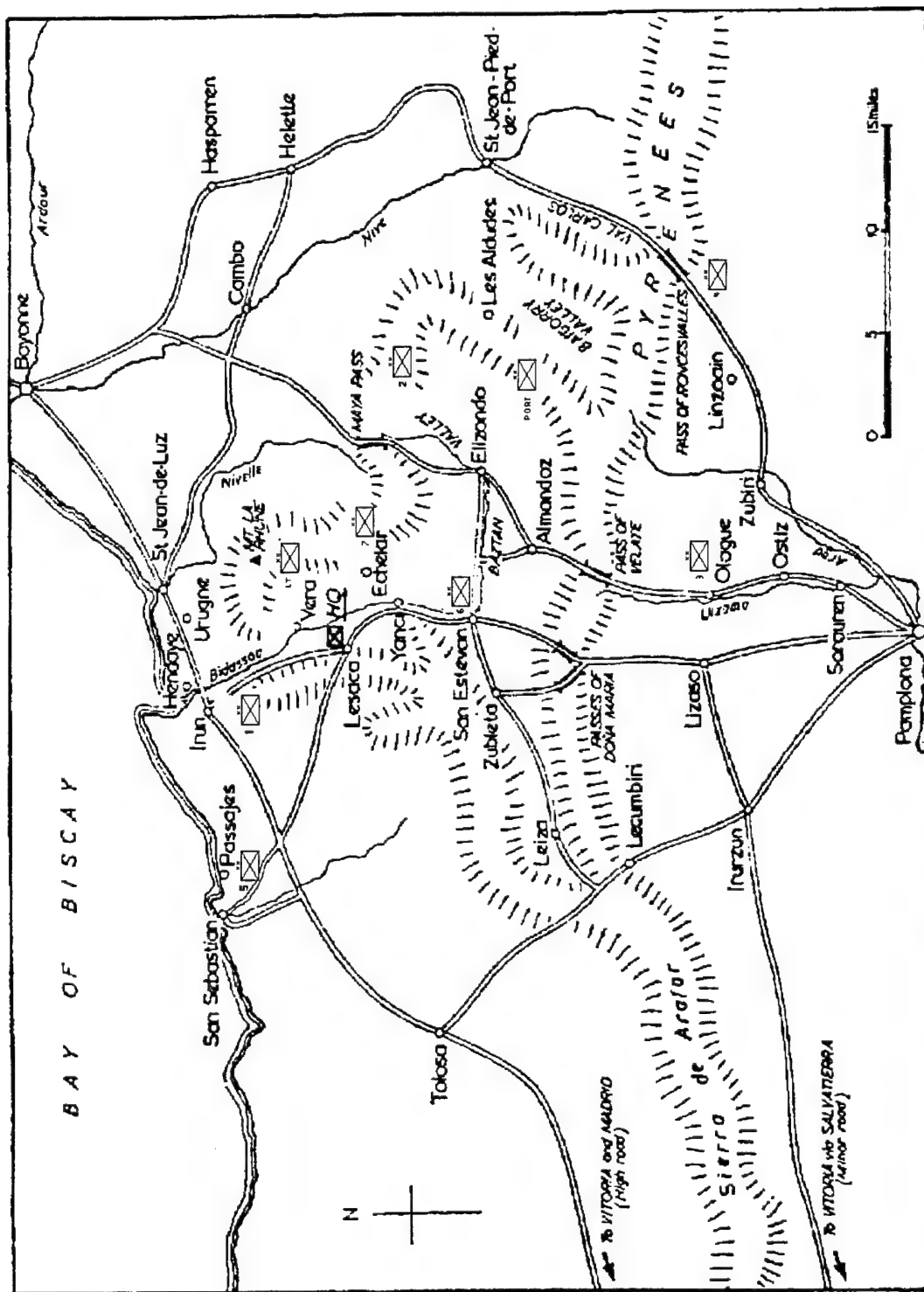


Figure 5. Disposition of Anglo-Allied Army, July 1813. Source: Michael Glover, *The Peninsular War 1807-1814*, London: David Charles Newton and Abbot, 1974, 250.

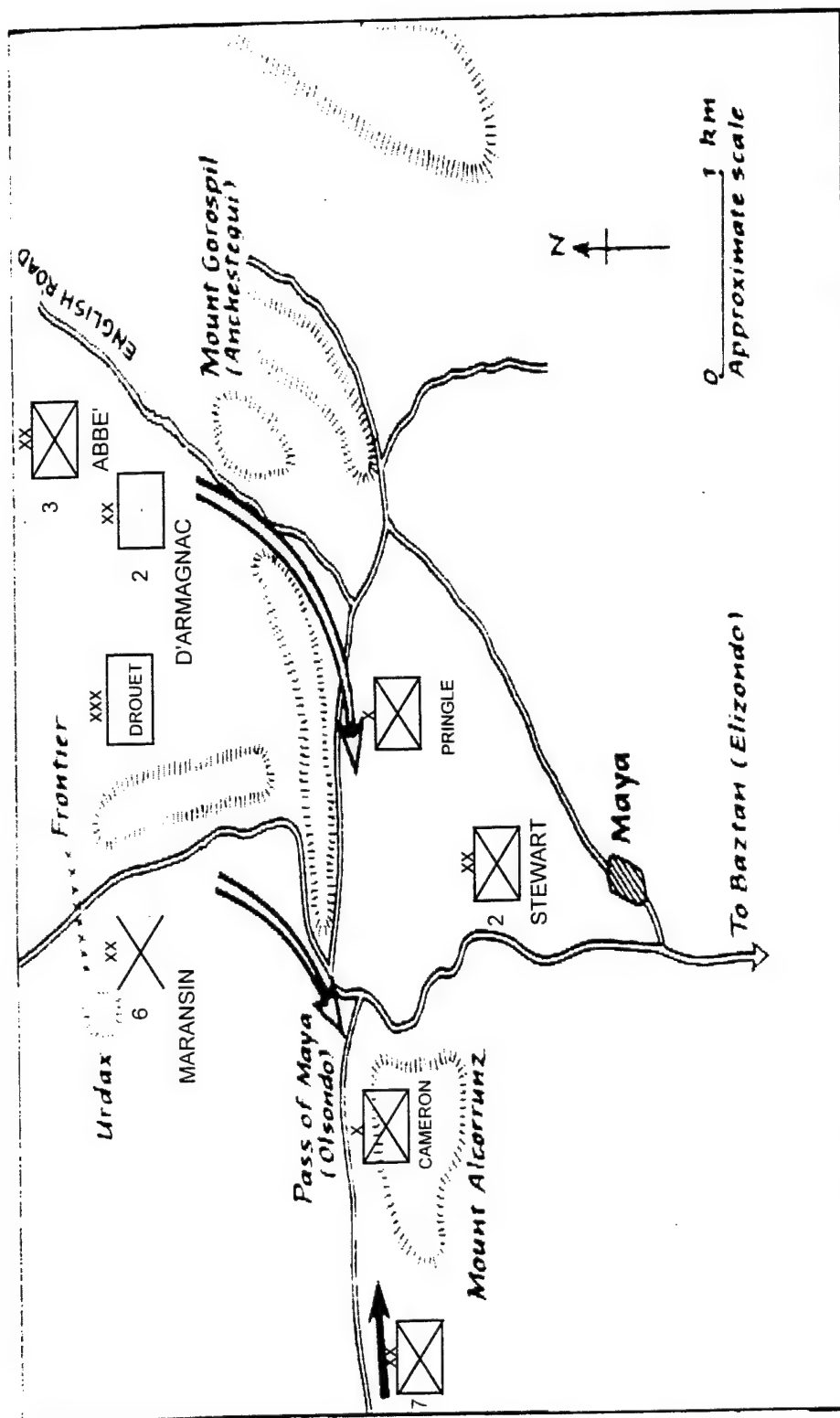


Figure 6. The Battle of Maya, 25 July 1813. Source: Julian Paget, *Wellington's Peninsular War: Battles and Battlefields*, London: Leo Cooper, 1990, 184.

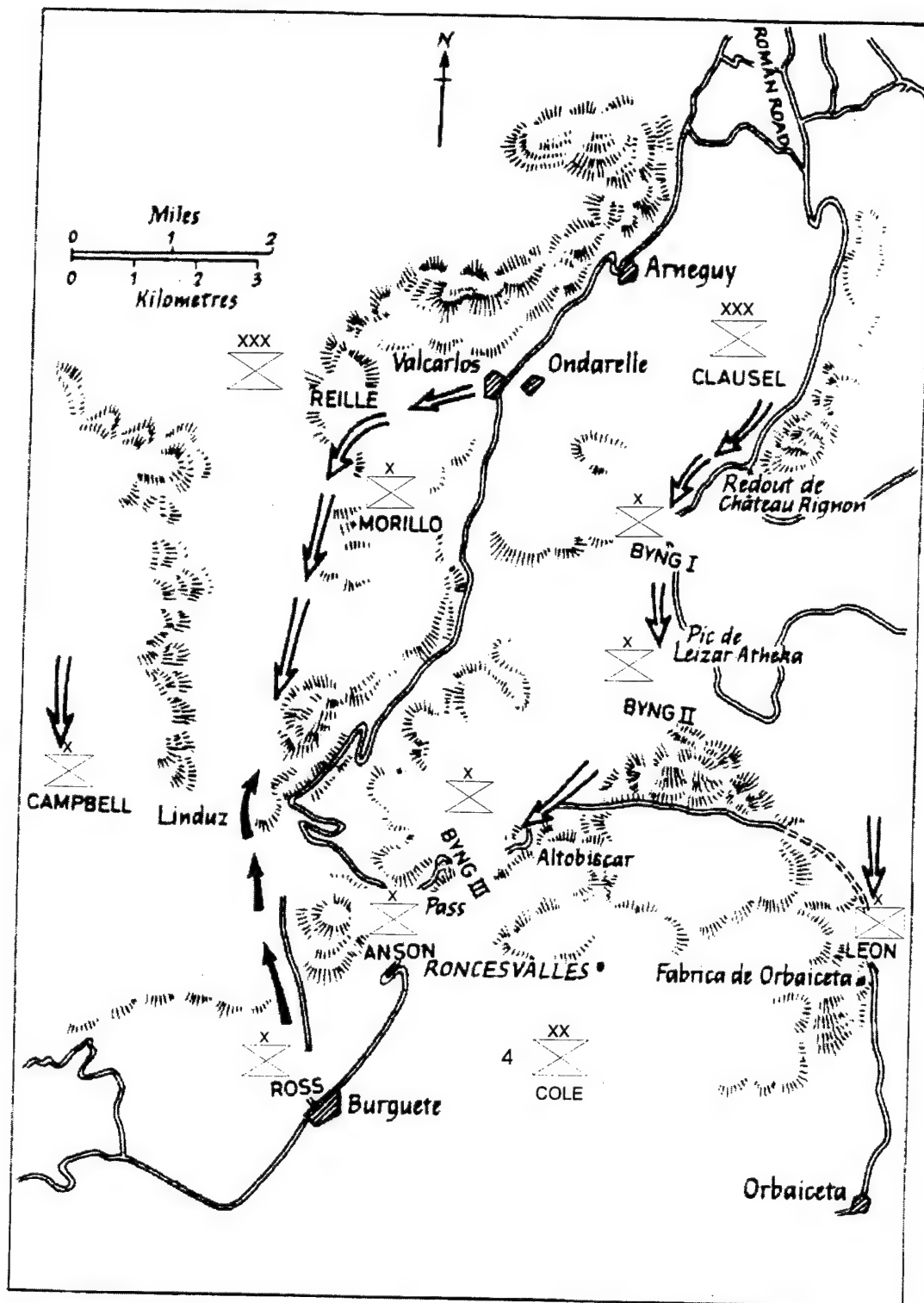


Figure 7. The Battle of Roncevalles, 25 July 1813. Source: Julian Paget, *Wellington's Peninsular War: Battles and Battlefields*, London: Leo Cooper, 1990, 190.

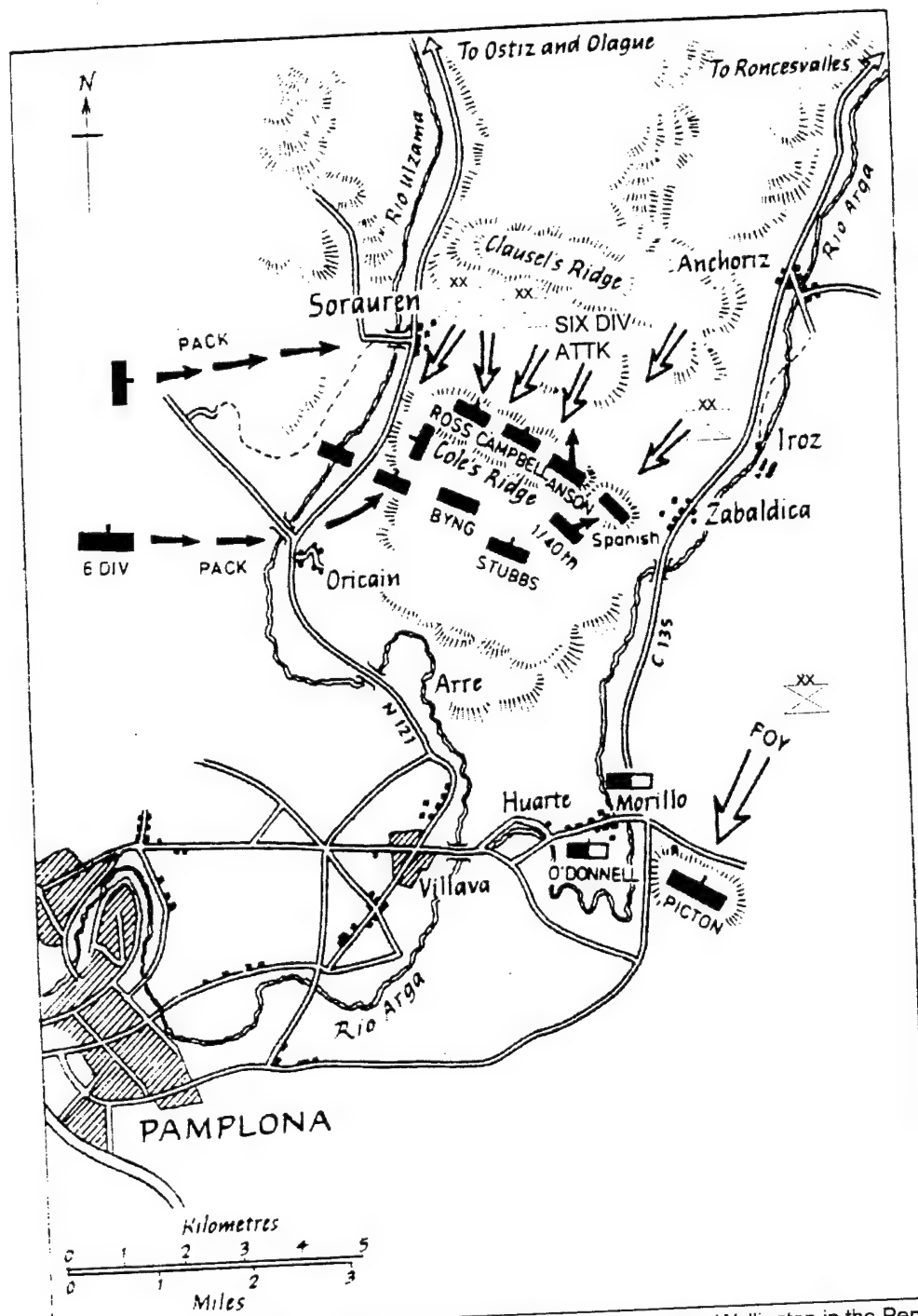
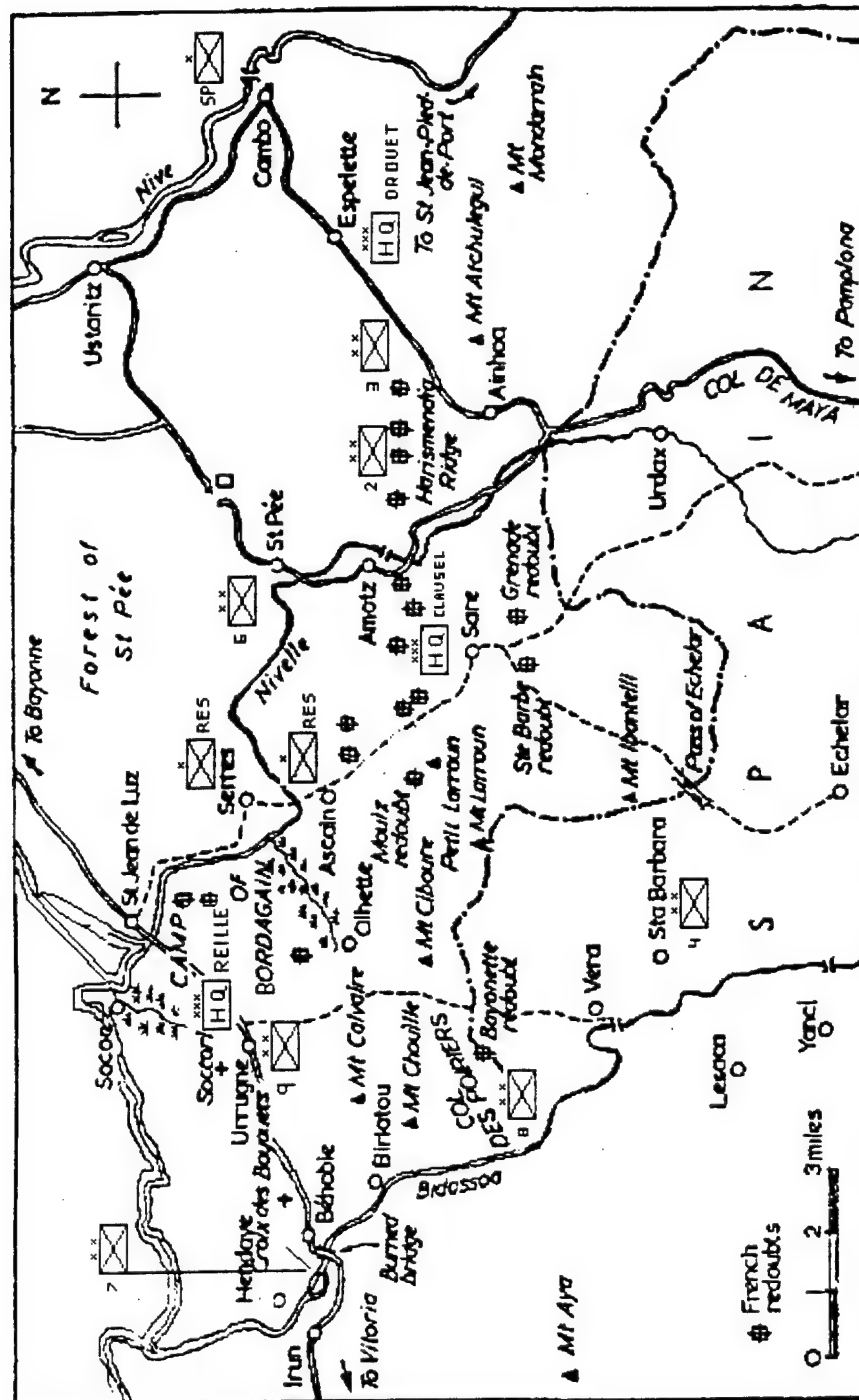
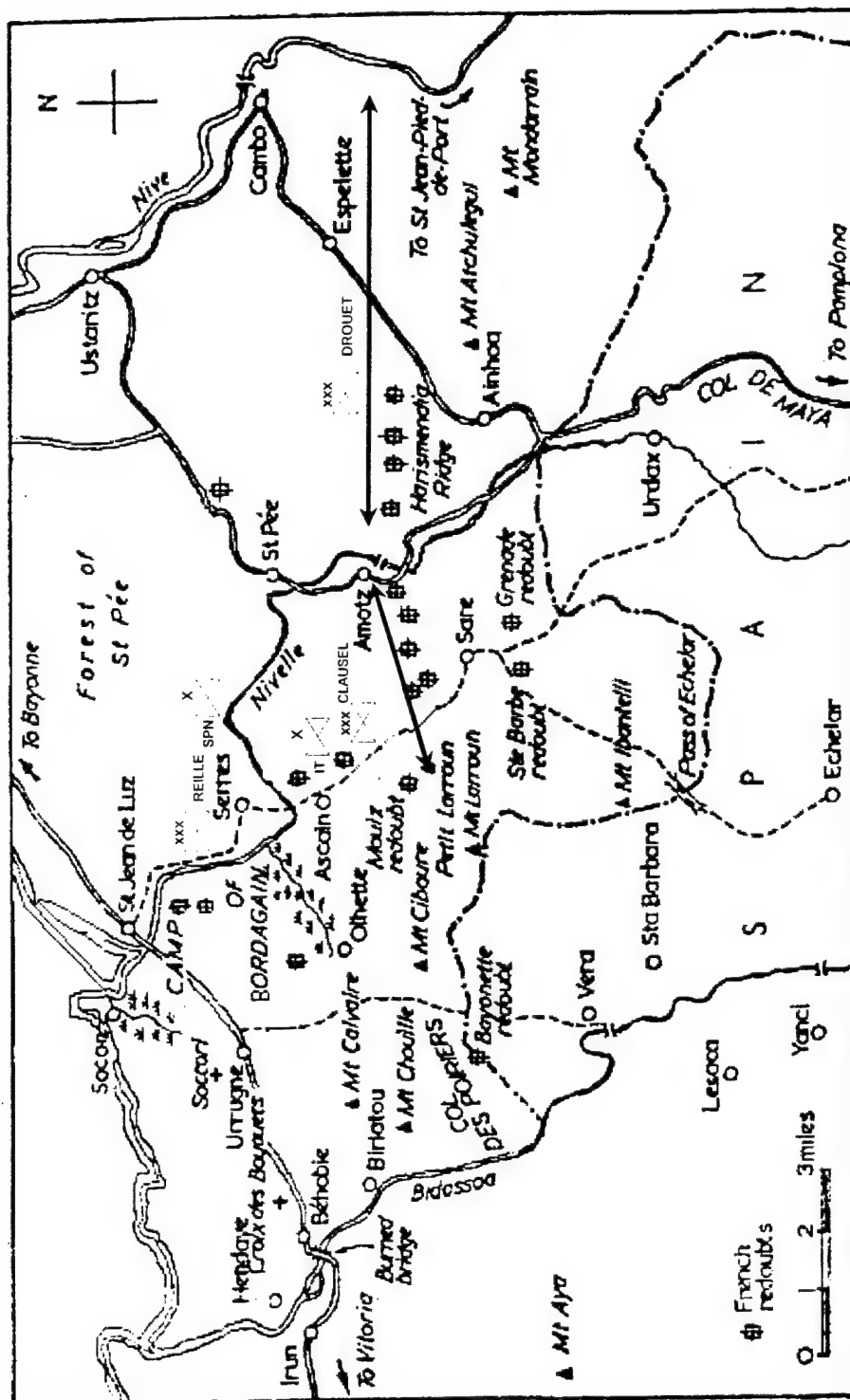


Figure 8. The Battle of Sorauren, 28 July 1813. Source: Jac Weller, *Wellington in the Peninsula 1808-1814*. London: Greenhill Books, 1992, 296.





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